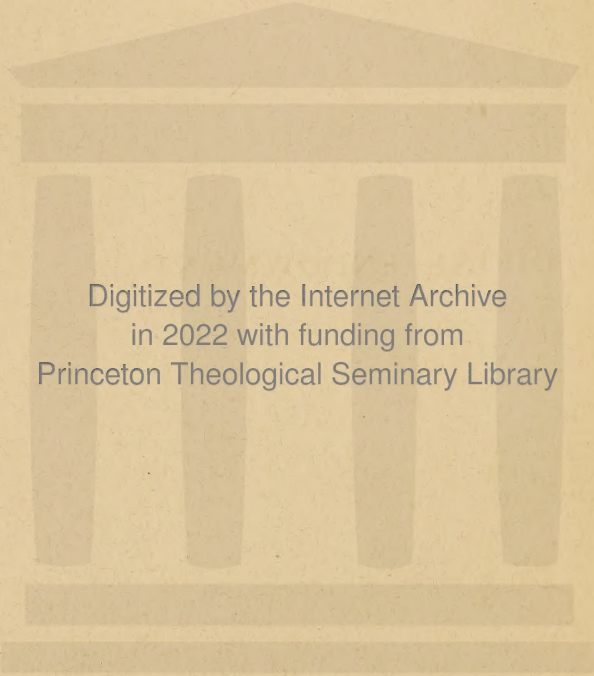


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THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

DIVINE ENDOWMENT

CONSIDERATIONS OF THE
GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

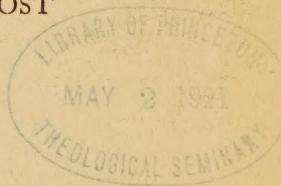
BY THE
REV. JESSE BRETT, L.T.H.

AUTHOR OF "THE ALTAR AND THE LIFE," "LIFE'S POWER," "THE
SCHOOL OF DIVINE LOVE," "THE CROSS," ETC.

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PREFACE

IN the following pages an attempt has been made to present the spiritual life as it may be developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Whose gifts we have received. It is felt that the attempt will be justified if it be the means of awakening any souls to a true sense of the power possessed by them. In an age when spiritual power is challenged persistently it is of the greatest importance that Catholics should know within themselves the blessing and richness of the supernatural gifts with which they are endowed. That they are being recognized and valued is perhaps the best reason for this little book; for Catholics are not impatient of instruction in spiritual things.

The writer begs the prayers of his readers.

J. B.

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DIVINE ENDOWMENT

I

Introduction

THE Christian soul is divinely dowered. This is a simply stated fact; but seeing that man is a spiritual being, and that he has an eternal future, it is of stupendous consequence. It is the central truth of the doctrine of grace; and so of the sacramental life. The Sacraments are something more than beautiful forms. They are "effectual signs of grace."¹ They are the divinely ordered means of sanctifying grace. Their effects in our sanctification are sufficient evidence of the nature and origin of grace. It is of God. It is Divine. God thus reveals His Personal concern in our sanctification. He is faithful to His Own implied promise. When He calls us to Himself; bids us "come";² declares the truth of sacramental union;³ promises a special indwelling of Himself;⁴

¹ Art. XXV.

² S. John vii. 37; S. Matt. xi. 28.

³ S. John vi. 53-58; xv. 4-10.

⁴ S. John xiv. 23.

there is an assurance of grace contingent upon our effort and obedience. Sanctification is effected through the union of the soul with God by grace.

Each of the three Persons in the Divine Trinity is concerned in this work of grace in the human soul. There is no absolute separation, although we recognize a distinction, between the operations of the Three Divine Persons; and we may contemplate the action proper to each. But contemplation of the mystery of the Divine Nature confirms our faith. We adore each Person as God and Lord; but we adore but One Love, One Being. The Divine Persons are so revealed to the faithful soul that They can never be confused; but neither can They be separated. We adore the Father, the Eternal Source of all being; the Son, the Eternal Word, the Incarnate Lord, the memorial of Whose sacrifice and death is presented continually before our eyes; the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, giving power by His Gifts to men. But because of the Eternal Unity we may perceive only unity of purpose in all that God does for us. This Divine love is conveyed to us immediately, breathed forth, by the Holy Spirit, Who in His eternal procession from the Father and the Son is Himself Love. His gifts are rich through love. While they make the Divine love most evident, they also empower the soul and make it capable of loving the most High God. Every consideration of His

Gifts should both quicken our love, and move us to admiration—yea, to adoration.

We have set ourselves to consider the endowment of the human soul by the Holy Spirit. In order to understand our place and calling within the Church, we are venturing within the realm of sacred mysteries, to contemplate that which existed in God before the world was, and we pray that same Holy Spirit to guide us to the understanding of that which is revealed. There is one manifestation of the Holy Spirit which bears directly upon our subject. When Moses was instructed as to the arrangement of the Tabernacle, and directed as to the ceremonial to be observed, he was admonished to be faithful to that which had been shown him on the Mount.¹ Of the golden candlestick with its seven lamps, it is particularly stated that it was made "*according to the pattern which the Lord had shewed Moses.*"² Is there no connection here with that which S. John saw in his great vision, the "*seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God*"?³ Did Moses contemplate that same heavenly vision? Was it given him to perceive that the ordered earthly symbols were in some way necessary to the preservation among his people of certain great truths, some essential features of the Divine life? Had they for

¹ Ex. xxv. 9, 40; xxvi. 30; Heb. viii. 5; ix. 23.

² Numb. viii. 4.

³ Rev. iv. 5. Cf. also i. 4; iii. 1.

him, as he set them in their places, a significance which only that vision could explain? Surely there was nothing within the Tabernacle, as there was nothing in the details of its construction, which to him did not speak of the mystic glory of the vision wherein he learned the pattern of the things to be made. But, we think, there was more than vision, or rather that the vision itself drew him until he contemplated the mystery of the Divine nature, led deeper and deeper as he became purer in spirit through the operation of Divine love. Intuitions of Divine glory must have exalted him in knowledge above all men of his time; and with reference to the seven lamps of the sanctuary, it would appear that he had some understanding of the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost, and of His gifts in relation to man in his approach to God, that is, in the life of prayer. The Holy Spirit Himself revealed to him the mystery of His Own Eternal Procession, that the nature of His Gifts might be known. They are given forth by Him from out of the exhaustless treasure of the Divine life; and by means of them, when faithfully used, we may apprehend God, and become united to Him. Every gift of the Holy Ghost is a means to union. Union is effected by love; but love itself is perfected through the use of His gifts.

When later the Prophet Isaiah foretold the spiritual endowment of the Incarnate Word, the sevenfold

revelation of the Holy Ghost was made more articulate. “*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots : And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.*”¹ We are instructed in the gifts which correspond, as we now consider them, with the Seven Lamps of the Sanctuary, and the Seven Lamps of S. John’s vision. This declaration comes midway between the two visions. So, on earth, we have the lamps of the Tabernacle ; in the prophecy a meaning ; in the vision of S. John, which is a revelation to the Church, the Seven Lamps before the Throne which show the perfect operation of the Spirit, and confirm us in our veneration of His gifts.

Let us contemplate this as Divine truth, inseparable from the eternity of God, a revelation of His essential love, ever going forth with purpose and power. It is not an effect of the Divine life, or love ; but the very life itself, the very love in its essential movement. It is so sublime that we cannot reach its height ; for who can attain to the contemplation of the eternity of God in those mysteries which are beyond the reach of created intelligence, wherein He can be known only to Himself ? And yet we know

¹ Isa. xi. 1, 2.

it concerns us most intimately; for there is nothing in God that may be known by us, which is not in some way necessary to us. Even those attributes of His Being and Majesty which are beyond our knowledge, give force and beauty to all that we may know of Him; and will be found necessary to the human soul in its perfect state hereafter. All our perceptions of God here, all holy intuitions, are necessary to the advancing soul. They are more than simple attractions of His beauty, more than impressions of Divine reality; they are gifts of knowledge from Him, in some way contributing to our sanctity. There is given with every degree of this knowledge a certain elevating grace which raises the soul above the characteristic likings and attractions of the lower nature. Hence in the Saints we remark an almost complete absence of baser desires. To contemplate the eternity of God is to lose the taste for that which cannot live upon the heights of His love. If we know this, how can we excuse to ourselves our impoverished religious ideals? Of course, no valid excuse can be found. If we turn away from the vision, we alone suffer. The vision itself is not obscured; but our own souls are darkened. We who by nature are fitted to reflect the Divine light, are blinded as soon as we turn to the darkening shadows of the world.

Oh, that souls created for God would keep their

powers for Him, and consistently follow His leading, and in contemplation of the Vision attain to the pure conception of life as it ought to be lived in Him !

I

Meditation upon the Divine life leads us to a larger view of human life. All that we are, and know ourselves to be, all that life holds or promises, is taken up into, and made one with, the glorious purpose of God. A wide and wondrously inspiring vision reveals the purpose of life and our own place in the eternal scheme of things. The life of the Church, the life of the individual, are seen more clearly. Each is beheld as ideally beautiful, because the Spirit of God rests upon it. To rise up in faithfulness to the ideal is the work of the Christian. But the same Spirit Who clothes the ideal with His Own glory, is also the enabling Spirit. The ideal for us is the perfection of His Own work in us.

How often the life both of the Church and of the Christian is narrowed and cramped. But a cramped and narrowed life is a life without vision. And "*where there is no vision the people perish.*"¹ If religion is soulless, if Christians live aimlessly, if spiritual life is dull and unprogressive, what is the cause if it be not this—there is no vision ? And why

¹ Prov. xxix. 18.

no vision? Surely because there is little understanding of the reality of spiritual gifts, and therefore little use of them. Catholics may not need to be reminded of this; but there are multitudes to whom the catholic conception of the Holy Spirit's gifts is a strange thing. But short of this there can be no vision as the Saints have understood it. We need the power and illumination of the Spirit, to be realized through every one of His gifts, if we would look out upon the expanse of the Divine eternity, and understand the true worth of life.

But it must be through patience that we attain to the open vision. Desultory devotion, faint-heartedness in prayer, and love of the world, are the chief hindrances. But patient love will bear the soul onward to the unfolding of the vision. And let us not force our way beyond the power of our love. We shall have cause to repent if we do. If this be difficult to understand, it will become plain to us if we consider how pride may enter in, and we may desire even spiritual attainments for our own self-pleasing. Love forbids this over-reaching in spiritual things; for its sole object is God, not the self. Love is content to explore the depths of the soul's life, while the vision inspires its action in order that the very purpose of Divine love may be fulfilled. We have a duty in respect of the present work of love. Suffering and discipline are not perhaps what we

desire naturally; but there is a work of love to be accomplished by means of them, and until we have done our best we shall have no higher vision. But faithfulness will be rewarded by vision. Love that is generously active towards God will be rewarded with intuitions of glory, not yet manifested, but ready to be revealed when the soul is fitly prepared in love. So Moses was given the vision on Sinai, so wonderful in all its details that we might have thought of him as more than satisfied. But the Saints know well that each manifested glory may be but the hiding of God.¹ “The communication and sense of His presence, however great they may be, and the most sublime and profound knowledge of God which the soul may have in this life, are not God essentially, neither have they any affinity with Him, for in very truth He is still hidden from the soul.”² The more perfect the love of any soul, the more certainly will that one know that beyond all present conceptions of God lie the essential truths of His Being. Thus Moses knew by intuition, as his love increased, that the essential glory lay beyond all that he saw, and although he had seen and experienced so much, he cried out: “*I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory.*”³ There was a further grace to be desired, and he prayed for it, because, having received

¹ Cf. Isa. xlv. 15.

² *S. John of the Cross*, Sptl. Cant. i. 2, 3.

³ Exod. xxxiii. 18.

already so much, he was constrained by love to ask for more.¹ So we ourselves are not beyond the outer circle of His glory; but we know that within all we may contemplate there is what He is to Himself. There within the glory unfolding to us is the Divine reality which allures us, love assures us of it, and faith substantiates it.

How does this bear upon the desirability of vision on the part of the Christian? How does it assist us in the practice of the spiritual life? Precisely in proportion to our faithfulness in love. The vision is that which we apprehend of God by love. The more we contemplate His perfections with admiration and adoration, the more there is revealed to love. We are led from thought to thought of all that He is, to that which is beyond thought, where we must remain in mute worship, knowing because we love, but powerless before that exceeding glory wherein God abides in the essential joy of love beyond even a seraph's power of sight. When the common duties of the day recall us to action, we shall perform them with care because of the vision. They will not appear, as is sometimes assumed, as hindrances to spiritual life, because we shall neither over-estimate nor despise them. All rightful occupation, and intercourse with others, become to the faithful soul means for its self-expression. When,

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, Sptl. Cant. xxxiii. 5.

therefore, the soul bears within itself the reflection of some Divine light, its self-expression becomes, in some sort, divine. What would be the effect if every Christian were to bring into everyday life that supernatural beam? And yet it is for that we are empowered by the Holy Ghost. If we used His gifts always according to His purpose in bestowing them, there would be for all a clearer vision, and great mutual encouragement and assistance.

Oh, that the vision were more desired, more clearly seen, more loved! Great would be the progress of souls in personal holiness, and marvellous the effect upon the world. What appears to be needed is a general quickening of souls in loving desire after God, and steadfastness of purpose in the spiritual life. If we will do our part, God will give the vision. And our part is not merely to exercise ourselves in the understanding of all that God reveals concerning Himself, but to follow on with distinct and definite acts of the will. To know is not sufficient for sanctification; we must will to do; we must aspire to such perfection of being as shall consist in a true inward correspondence of soul to the revealed perfection of God. To him who through the grace of the Holy Spirit wills both to be and to do, there is given a consciousness of power through the abounding increase of Divine love within the soul. And that love is of the Holy Spirit.

II

Wheresoever we are, we are in the presence of Divine mysteries. We cannot shut ourselves away from the presence of God. "*Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence*"? ¹ If we recollect ourselves in that presence, we may immediately give attention to any one of those mysteries, and adore God in that revelation of Himself. No one should remain content in ignorance of God, seeing that His Self-revelation is at all times ready for our contemplation. We need but the will directed in love. He rewards the will to know Him, because that will is the soul's response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit. The omnipresence of God, which we acknowledge so unthinkingly, is the first and most gracious movement in His Self-revelation. He is near, with us, at all times and in all places, ready to answer to every desire we may cherish towards Him; for as every desire is inspired by Him we may understand His readiness to satisfy them. If we have any love for God our hearts must go out to Him with increasing desire to know Him. His response is always in accordance with that revelation of Himself which the Church has received. The surest way to know Him is to seek Him in the

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 7.

light of that revelation; and there is no mystery that remains long concealed from love.

Knowledge and love must go together. Mystics sometimes assume a certain independent action of love whereby it ascends beyond the knowledge which a soul may possess. But in this assumption too little account is taken of that spiritual illumination which is often granted to quite simple souls. So our Lord Himself has taught us, "*Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.*"¹ Of this L'Abbé Lejeune writes, "In spite of the exterior simplicity of these souls they may be most brilliantly illuminated by God, and if they love in an unusual way, I conclude, without any hesitation, that the nature of their knowledge is as far removed from the commonplace as is their love."² To such souls the understanding of Divine mysteries becomes the simple and natural joy of devotion as they exercise themselves according to the degree of their knowledge and love. It may be they will not trouble to distinguish between the two gifts or powers, because being mutually dependent they may appear to operate as one; and they will take the characteristics of love. This is really the simplicity of the Saints which we should desire for ourselves when we meditate upon the mysteries of God.

¹ S. Matt. xi. 25.

² *A Manual of Mystical Theology.*

The most profound mystery of the Divine Nature is that of the Trinity. We cannot separate any part of the Divine manifestation from that primary truth. It is the mystery behind even the simplest proofs of His love and care. The moment we reflect upon God we are led by our own spiritual act into the presence of the Divine Trinity. We contemplate the action of the Three Divine Persons separately, but the unity is perceived through the singleness of love. Although we rightly assign to each His distinctive function or operation, yet all Three are concerned in the same act. This is most evident in the work of the Holy Ghost. "The Holy Ghost is of the Father. But also He is "of the Son," not mediately, as of one coming between; not conjointly, as of the Father and Son together; but primarily of the Father, secondarily of the Son, and by the same mode of procession, except that what the Father has He has of Himself, and what the Son has He has from the Father. Therefore the procession is derivatively from the Son, a part of that property of the Son which He has derivatively from the Father—"The Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son." ²

So we contemplate the eternal and ceaseless activity

¹ S. John xiv. 26; xv. 26.

² Fr. R. M. Benson: Retreat Notes. *The Cowley Evangelist*, Aug. 1919.

of the Holy Trinity, the eternal energy of Divine love. That energy is manifested in the procession of the Holy Ghost Who Himself enriches and endows our souls with His Own gifts. And all this rests upon other movements of that same energy of love within the Divine Trinity. We think of the Holy Ghost glorifying the Body of the Lord Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and not of His Human Body only. His Mystical Body shares in that glory. Every member of the Church—“*His Body*”—is to know by experience that glorifying energy of Divine love through the power and working of the Holy Ghost.

1. *In Prayer.*—Howsoever we regard the prayer of the Christian it is in some way an assertion of sonship. The Christian is “a member of Christ, a child of God,” and all true prayer is an occupation of the soul within that relationship. At the time of prayer there should be a flowing in upon the soul of the very light of that glory of the Holy Ghost which invests the Sacred Humanity of our Lord. And this we understand as the truth concerning all experiences in prayer which increase our knowledge of God and our love for Him, and encourage spiritual effort, and inspire to holiness. If we are amazed at the experience of the Saints in prayer, we need only reflect that in them we see examples, higher than our own, of the manifest working of the Holy Ghost. What

He does in certain great souls He is ready to accomplish in countless others the moment they are prepared for Him. It is our faulty weakness in prayer that is the cause of our failure. If we persevered in prayer as the noblest spiritual work, we should know far more than we do of the Spirit's power.

2. *In Communion.*—The joy of the devout communicant may be considered as that which he experiences through the procession of the Holy Ghost within his soul. The Holy Ghost extends within the soul of the faithful communicant the eternal joy of the Divine Word, for He is the Spirit of love proceeding from the Father and the Son. That which our Lord realized for His Own comfort during the thirty-three years of His earthly life, is to be realized by the soul in union with Him. Into the joy of the Hypostatic Union there must have entered somewhat of that eternal ecstasy of the Divine Trinity, the essential love of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord must have known in His Human Nature the gladness through the power of the Holy Ghost Whose procession was even within that nature which He shares with us. As, therefore, He takes the soul into Sacramental union with Himself there is in a corresponding degree the procession of the Holy Ghost within it. This opens out a vast field of spiritual development for the soul that can realize it. If it is an investment of the soul with a supernatural

glory, it is the glory of power bestowed, of life spiritualized, and not of something transient, however joyful. We begin to understand how the Divine endowment of the soul, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, may become more and more the means of attainment to those who use them. The very thought is one to inspire, and if it seems too great to be true, we have but to use the gifts in order to prove how wonderful is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It is better to have some clear conception of His love and power than to go on with only the vaguest ideas of His coming and work. Can we not in this way understand a little more fully our Lord's Own prayer that His Own might have His joy fulfilled in themselves? ¹

3. *In every advancing work of love within the soul.*—The Divine love operates within the soul in manifold ways as the Holy Ghost directs it in the path of sanctification. He guides the soul according to His Divine knowledge both of its state and its end. His work within us is to be understood not from our limited self-knowledge, but from His perfect knowledge and the directness of His purpose towards us. There is no spiritual experience, whether of joy or pain, which is not immediately related to that eternal purpose which the Holy Ghost wills to fulfil in us. We need to remember this in days when shadow and

¹ Cf. S. John xvii. 13.

suffering seem to prevail; when the light of God is obscured by the very condition of the inner life. In so far as this state is not the result of sin, but of Divine action, we should regard it simply in relation to the end set before us—the glory of God and our own sanctification. In every spiritual experience we may recognize the working of the Holy Ghost Who will inspire us, even in our suffering, with deep thoughts of love. He brings to the willing soul the very and immediate thought of love from the Father and the Son. He Himself becomes within the soul the power of love's response. He moves us to make it according to the Divine thought in the Heart of God. This is one effect in us of His eternal procession. We may be able to do no more than make a simple response of love, but in so doing we perceive, however faintly, the light of that eternal wisdom which shapes our end. The glory of the Divine purpose in our sanctification appears in the distance—or what to us appears as distance. But love making the sacrifice required for an act of submission finds an interior way to certainty and peace. It is a living way defined by the infused thought of God; and that which had oppressed us as something that was not love is found to be but the hiding of love, a way for the Spirit of God. "*He made darkness His secret place.*"¹

¹ Ps. xviii. 11.

III

The operations of the Holy Ghost within the soul cannot be fully known and understood apart from His gifts. As they are directly gifts from God to men, we must know their nature if we would use them rightly. They are not created gifts. They are gifts to us as spiritual beings from the Spirit of God. They are calculated to empower and raise the human spirit. Rightly used they are means to an end, and that end is union with God. They are essentially love which is itself the means of that union. We cannot use them according to the mind of the Giver except through love. Love finds in them all that can stimulate its own energy. Beginning with the gift of Holy Fear, love moves with reverent steadfastness towards God, and finds fresh lights upon the way, the lights of the succeeding gifts, and gazing through the splendour of the Seven Gifts, as through a sevenfold light, descries its own perfection in the gift of Holy Wisdom.

We shall follow this order in considering the several gifts, taking with us the light of each to guide us to the understanding of that supreme and utterly glorious gift of Wisdom, the crown of sanctity, relying upon the Holy Ghost the Divine Giver.

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are in character essentially joyous, and should be used joyously. They

were bestowed at the moment of our Lord's joyous exaltation at the right hand of the Father. They are proofs to us of His glory. As the fulfilment of His promise they witness to His exaltation. Each gift in its degree should be understood in this connection. As connected with the Ascension of our Lord, they are gifts which should raise us to the joy of His exaltation. Looking to their spiritual meaning even the gift of Holy Fear has a use pre-eminently joyous, for it is a means of advance towards perfection of life in God. And we ought to rejoice in the prospect of spiritual attainment, and aspire to it with ardour as love is quickened within us.

.

O Almighty God, Who, that we may truly know both ourselves and Thee, hast endowed us with spiritual gifts; enable us both to understand them and to use them according to Thine Own purpose in bestowing them, that we may attain to the blessedness of Thy perfect light and love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever. Amen.

II

The Gift of Holy Fear

I

LET us contemplate the holiness of God, so wonderful, so impenetrable, and yet so attractive : holiness that even the Seraphim cannot perfectly comprehend, even though they cry adoringly, “ *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts.*”¹ Ardent spirits, burning with love, they have power through correspondence with Divine love to penetrate the eternal mystery of love ; but ever as they adore they are constrained by all that they perceive to declare the holiness of God, of the eternal Trinity. In Himself love is expressed in holiness as an all-embracing attribute of His Divinity. It is not a negative holiness, *i. e.* holiness which consists in the mere absence of sin. That would be but a poor and inadequate and altogether unworthy conception of that which characterizes God the All-Holy, the Most High. We contemplate His holiness as that which is positive, and active in the Divine willing of every conceivable good ; holiness which in its Divine purposefulness reaches to

¹ Isa. vi. 3.

perfection beyond the intuition of even the highest creature. The Seraphim as they adore Him discern degrees of holiness in God beyond their powers of apprehension. All they can declare is contained in their words "*Holy, Holy, Holy!*"

And God is to be adored in each movement of His love, seeing that every such movement declares His holiness. We raise our hearts, we pass beyond all thought of sin, beyond the impressions of earth, to be with the hosts of Angels and of Saints, and with them aspire to the vision, the penetrating knowledge of that holiness. Who may contemplate the All-Holy God? May *we* dare so to do, when the holiest of men have been abased in His presence? Can we read the life of any Saint and not be struck by his self-abasement at the thought of the holiness, the purity, of God? Shall we dare to contemplate Him when Isaiah could say, "*Woe is me, for I am undone*";¹ when Daniel could say, "*O my Lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me*";² and S. John, writing of his vision, said, "*I fell at His feet as dead*"?³ If such was the experience of the greatest Saints, what can we expect for ourselves? God has given to us the power to attain to the vision. He has bestowed upon us His gifts, a rich spiritual endowment whereby we may become, if we are faithful, strong to stand upon the mountain of vision. The first of these

¹ Isa. vi. 5.

² Dan. x. 16.

³ Rev. i. 17.

gifts is that of Holy Fear. The beginnings of holiness in the individual are found in reverence for God.

In our Lord Jesus Christ we mark this first gift of Holy Fear. Being Man He shows forth in our nature the glory of the Holy Spirit's Gifts. We see in Him the reverence of pure innocence, the virtue which enables us to behold the beauty of God, with a freedom which never presumes, a familiarity which is the complement of separateness only possible to those who are separate from sin, from all that is contrary to God. So we think of it in our Incarnate Lord, a certain quality within His love for the Father. The gift of Holy Fear is in Him as a principle that makes for both sweetness and strength. It is the same in any soul faithful in the use of the gift. It produces a degree of sweetness in which God delights. It removes the soul from the danger to presumption, and exalts it to great delight in God. And where there is no presumption on man's part, there is on His part a movement of love drawing the soul towards Himself.

II

God Who is All-Holy seeks to attract us to Himself, and has bestowed upon us the gift of Holy Fear, which, if rightly used, assists the soul and makes sure its first steps in the way of holiness. The vision of

God's holiness is for those who have responded to His Spirit. Let us trace some of the motions of the Spirit of Holy Fear.

1. *Reverence*.—We are awed by the presence of God. We fear to offend Him by bringing into His presence anything incongruous. This should be perfected as a habit that so we may never presume upon God. There is widespread need of this. Often it is the result of carelessness; but that may be sinful. A near vision of God would produce in us fear akin to terror.¹ And yet how near we are always to Him. If our eyes be holden yet should our souls be trained to deep interior reverence. We should remember the Divine indwelling by nature, grace, and love; and this demands of us a certain habitual reverence. We do not dwell with God as with One Who is in every respect apart from us; but with One Who, although All-Holy, yet indwells the soul, keeping it from thoughts and impulses contrary to His Own holiness. How should we not fear the unloving inclinations, the uncontrolled imaginings, seeing how they affect our sense of His presence and holiness! The gift of Holy Fear becomes within us the power that restrains. We should cherish it very lovingly in view of growing needs, desires and longings, and in view of all that God may will to reveal, because for the understanding of the ways of Divine love within ourselves there is

¹ Cf. Heb. xii. 21; Dan. x. 16, 17; S. Luke ix. 34.

needed a degree of refinement which is the effect of the Holy Spirit's work within us.

Because this gift of Holy Fear is itself Divine, we have the awe-inspiring thought of *God restraining a soul from sin; of God moving a soul to reverence*. Could love do more? What is herein perceived but a Divine purpose in the soul's exaltation? What should we not hope for and expect in such a soul?

2. *A deepened sense of sin, compunction, contrition.* Reverence for God, awe in His presence, leads to a holy disposition of soul in opposition to sin. The soul that is much with God develops a marvellous sensitiveness to sin. Understanding it after a deep spiritual manner, they realize what sin is, they see the effects of the lightest faults, they are not regardless of secret imperfections, and they hasten to do penance. It is not thus with souls at their first awakening to sin. Contrition is then more evident in emotion, as the sins repented of are realized in their outward and apparent vileness. It is afterwards when these sins have not only been forsaken outwardly, but also dealt with in interior ways, that the deep sensitiveness of the soul towards the motions of sins is felt. There are occasions in the experience of every earnest soul when they are led apart, and made to see themselves. Perhaps in a time of retreat when alone with God they are compelled to regard an array of neglected sins, or to contemplate with

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shame some lowered ideals. Then the Holy Spirit of Fear comes to its aid with some gracious impulsion towards penance. It may be that the whole content of life appears as it is affected by sin; or the soul passing by the bare facts of sin, realizes its effects upon itself; the will is weak, and there is little power of vision. The holiness of God as a pure ray reveals the repulsiveness of sin; and the gift of Holy Fear inclines the soul towards that very holiness with that desire which is ever a mark of contrite love.

3. *The will to sin is checked.*—Consider this evil: the will to sin may be active within a soul even when outwardly the life appears blameless. Such an one is withheld from actual sin not by the love of God, but by love of self, or by fear of the world. If this be permitted it must estrange a soul from God, hinder its progress, and be moreover an occasion of sorrow to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Spirit of Holy Fear, operating through love, exposes the danger and disposes the soul aright. We should examine ourselves upon this point. We know the mind of God as declared through the Prophet Ezekiel,¹ and by our Lord Himself.² The secret will to sin is grievous in His sight. The question may well arise in our hearts: Is this the cause of my failure? Does God turn from me just for that reason?

¹ Chap. xiv. 2.

² S. Matt. v. 28.

4. *A certain impulsion to reverence of soul.*—The Holy Spirit as He reveals to us the Divine holiness inspires us also with holier desires; we would correspond to that holiness not by the mere avoidance of sin, but by a certain fitness within ourselves. We would be holy, partakers of His holiness, and so He guides us in aspiration. Those deep longings of the human soul after God, that consuming desire for holiness, which souls may experience, are after all evidences of the gift of Holy Fear which imparts to the soul that very inward character of reverence which is an approach to the holiness of God. The Spirit of Holy Fear leads us to those higher ways. It is God Himself pleading with us.

In these several ways we may make use of the gift of Holy Fear, and attain to that habitual reverence which on the one hand will hold us back from evil, and on the other will find expression in holy aspiration. It remains for us to be in *will* united to God through this gift. Then the reverence, the awe, the holy anxiety which fill us at the suggestion of evil, become movements of love uniting us ever closer with God. And this is a wonderful protection. The soul united to God is not sullied by the sight of evil. As the sight of evil does not tarnish the Divine glory, so the soul, as long as it is united to God, need not fear to be sullied by the sight of evil which the enemy may present to trouble it. The soul

united to God in will offers nothing that is either assent or consent to the evil one. And if this be expressed in suffering, then *that* becomes a source of strength; for suffering presents an occasion when the faithful soul will become stronger as it acts strongly.

III

The Spirit of Holy Fear as He leads the soul to forsake all sin, both inwardly and outwardly, guides it also in its prayer. We can make no progress without reverence. Prayer regarded as spiritual work may be described as a Divine Act. It is the work of love, and love itself is divine. Prayer as the work of love tends perpetually towards the Divine perfections as love within the soul delights in the attributes of its Divine Lover. But love is reverent. It regards its Object with a feeling of profound worship. The attitude of the loving soul in prayer is that of one who offers to God the homage of his whole nature. The faithful soul uses the gift of Holy Fear with a loving appreciation of its value, and finds how blessed it is. It is a light of correspondence to God, a lamp by means of which we mark the way of holiness. He Himself bestowed the gift to that end. We need it at the beginning when we are first attracted to prayer. We must tread carefully and with reverence, as Moses was admon-

ished at the Burning Bush.¹ We who would enter into communion with God must be prepared in reverence. The attraction to prayer is itself of God, Who seeks out the soul, but man on his part should be at least as reverent as he is eager in response.

The high attainment of the Saints in prayer is beautiful and most alluring; but if we analyze their prayer we shall see it begins with a profound sense of what is *due to God*. If we say their prayer was the outpouring of a great love, we must also acknowledge that Holy Fear guided them in such wise that they were ever lowly even in their most rapturous prayer. They sought not those wonderful graces which to our minds appear as the prominent characteristic of their prayer; rather they sought in humility, abjection, and profoundly loving reverence to give themselves to God, to bring their lives wholly under the governance of His Spirit. We often misunderstand the Saints because we look at the wonder of their lives and overlook their practice of the virtues. We are apt to confuse the conceptions of graces and virtues. If we regarded first their virtues we should cease to marvel at their graces. Virtue enables the soul to approach God with right dispositions—yea, with a degree of merit which God rewards.

¹ Exod. iii. 5.

Let us learn from them how to pray always with consciousness of God's majesty, holiness and love. If we would advance in prayer it must be from this beginning. And having experience of the working of this Spirit of Holy Fear in our prayer, we shall never consider that to be a good prayer which lacks that understanding of love between the soul and God which is the fruit of the Spirit of Holy Fear.

This needs to be reduced to practice in our prayer. We should renew our purpose of love from day to day with great reverence. In time it will become a fixed habit. Like every other habit, it is not all at once perfected. We may often fail, to our great distress; but if we are sincere we shall not lose heart. God knows our intention, and He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, but will respect the desire of the loving soul, and assist it. And this tender regard of God will yet further deepen our reverence. "*There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.*" ¹

Where there is this deep reverence for God, this profound sense of His holiness, there will be a readier ascent of the soul by means of the succeeding gifts. Humility is the first step in the way of advance. It is the beginning and crown of true greatness; and reverence, holy fear, is the expression towards God

¹ Ps. cxxx. 4.

of love and faith which are humble. Love which is true exalts the Beloved while it humbles the lover. And God Who beholds our love will in His Own way exalt us. So necessary is this humility that, both by precept and promise, He directs us in it. He does even more. He protects the virtue in His best-loved servants. If He gives marvellous proofs of His love, He is also careful of the soul's interior fitness for them. Great graces are given to souls in prayer, but never so abundantly as to those who are preserved supernaturally in humility. The greatness of their joy in His love, the height of their spiritual exaltation, are seemingly proportioned to the degree of their humility; not merely their self-abnegation, but that strange, deep conviction of their own utter worthlessness which suggests the presence in them of humility as an infused virtue. This characteristic of the Saints deserves more careful study on the part of those who would follow in their steps. It glows in them as the clear light from this gift of Holy Fear. It is so integral a part of the character of a Saint, that we must look for its effects within the life of Heaven itself, seeing that every aspect of sanctity must have there its appropriate glory. "*He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"¹ In Heaven we shall find the highest fulfilment of that word.

¹ S. Luke xiv. 11.

IV

We do not think of the gifts of the Holy Ghost as being ever lost by one who continues in grace. They constitute an endowment which we shall carry into the life beyond. It may well be that as they are mystically represented as burning lamps before the Throne, so they will be in the sanctified soul eternally as illuminated faculties whereby we shall apprehend God, and adore and serve Him. We may speak of them as faculties, because as gifts they must issue in conscious action of the soul before God, and become faculties of apprehension, understanding and attainment. By means of them we shall more perfectly adore and serve Him. Here on earth our offering of adoration is never quite what we wish it to be. There is a sense of its inadequacy even when we are most sincere. This is, of course, to be expected, because the more we love the less worthy does our love appear to us; and adoration is essentially an act of love. The gifts of the Holy Ghost being in themselves gifts of love must contribute in their several degrees to that pure apprehension of love that moves us to adoration. This follows from our experience in prayer wherein we perceive how each of the gifts, because it is of God, exalts us in that knowledge and understanding of His Being and power which awakens love. We shall note this in

connection with each of the seven gifts. We consider first of all the eternal operation of the Spirit of Holy Fear.

All that profound sense of God's holiness and majesty which is ours here will there be fixed as a habit of soul. How truly then we shall praise our God, love Him, adore Him, for all that now we are acquiring through difficulty ! In the quiet of our prayer we approach the realization of what God is. Some pure intuition rewards our reverence of love. We have perceived only in proportion to our love, and the purity of our intention. And this should increase. What it has been to Saints whose love has been perfected in this life is faintly discernible in what they have reluctantly told ; but enough may be learned to guide us to the understanding of the power of vision in souls made perfect. As we ponder their teaching, and know that they speak from their extraordinary experience of God, we recognize in them a power of perception, a degree of understanding wholly supernatural. If we attribute this to the many particular graces with which God rewarded them, we must also recognize in them the operation of the Holy Ghost through His gifts ; and the gift of Holy Fear was the beginning of their peculiar power. By virtue of that gift they were enabled to perceive so much, but also that same gift was manifest in the restraint which ever characterized their

utterances. That sacred gift which raised them to higher perceptions of God, controlled their speech, and preserved their humility.

When through the discipline of the spirit the soul is perfected in love, there will be a power of vision corresponding to the perfection which God has willed in us. We may even think of it as increasing in Heaven as the soul grows in brightness and attains to ever greater heights in the glory of love. So we may contemplate the Saints who, having reached perfection, use this gift with an exquisite sense of the purity of God. But words will not convey the impression of their rapture; only in the deep silence of prayer, as we ourselves use the sacred gift, can we know anything of it. We think of those great souls one by one in the vast array of the Saints; we think of their Queen, our Lady, and to each of them is given this unspeakable, tremendous joy—that for evermore this habit of Holy Fear will enable them to grasp, within the wonder of their eternal life, that immense truth of the *Holiness of God*.

The richness of our own spiritual endowment, the glory to which the gifts exalt us, cannot be realized except in the times of prayer, when the light of the gifts as glowing lamps illumines the way before us, and reveals the vision. Then we know, and are glad; for, as we have already said, the gifts of the Holy Ghost are joyous in their use and their end. If we

use them rightly we shall find continual encouragement, for they raise us towards God Who is Himself the supreme joy and reward of the faithful soul.

Let us treasure with profound reverence this gift of Holy Fear, and so use it that the future may reveal its glory according to the loving purpose of God.

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O most holy Lord God, Who hast bestowed on us the Spirit of Holy Fear; enable us to perceive the immensity of Thy favour and goodness towards us; and so to use Thy Gift that we may not fail to fulfil the purpose of Thy love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

III

The Gift of Godliness

I

LET us contemplate the Divine Word, the Son of God, in His relation to the Father. The Holy Spirit Himself, in the glorious mystery of His eternal procession, expresses and declares that relationship. He teaches us all things concerning the Son and the Father, because He "proceedeth from the Father and the Son." All that we may in detachment of spirit perceive as essential to that Divine relationship, in the incommunicable joy of the ever-blessed Trinity, finds its counterpart in the earthly and human life of Jesus. From first to last the Gospels reveal Him as seeking always and in all things the Father's glory. In this He showed that man must find the true end of his being by living for God alone. Thus we share in the fundamental principle of the life of the Son of God. Both as Man and as God, Jesus lived with His will wholly directed to the Father. What He was as God in relation to the Father, that He was also as Man; not by accommodation, but of necessity. He showed that it is necessary to the realization of

our true selves that we live also with wills directed wholly to God, as our Father. And in contemplation of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, the truth of the procession of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of love and unity, assists us in the realization of God's ideal of love towards which He would direct us. The ideal is that of Divine love perfectly expressed in us according to our human nature after the example of our Lord. And it is the Holy Spirit of Godliness or Piety Who assists us as we are found willing in aspiration and effort.

But this is on its Divine side precisely that which we understand of piety in its ordinary meaning. Piety includes all "affection and observance of duties towards our parents. But God is in the highest sense our Father, especially in the supernatural order." Therefore piety is in the highest sense the showing of love, and the observance of duties towards Him. It is the characteristic of one who appreciates his state as a child of God, in whose soul the infused grace of Holy Baptism has increased and become evident in the realization of sonship. How exceedingly joyous and beautiful that may become is part of our experience in the use we make of the Holy Spirit's Gift of Godliness, or Piety.

This gift is next in order after that of Holy Fear. The gift of Holy Fear enables us to understand what is due from us to God. That of Godliness, or Piety,

enables us to perform all that is rightful. (1) Towards God as our Sovereign Lord and infinitely good Father. In this we follow the examples of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in His piety was wholly given up in His interior to the Divine unity. In thought and in direction of the will He always tended to God as the Centre of all. This He did as Man; for it is man's proper action to be always tending towards God his true Centre; while God, as is proper to Him, moves in the energy of Divine love towards us from that Centre which is His Own Being. (2) Towards all who, like ourselves, belong to God and bear the impress of His image; not our parents and relations according to the flesh merely, but towards all the children of God. In this we follow, again, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in His piety was wholly given up in His exterior to us in life, in death, and in the Holy Eucharist. Our Lord was thus given up to us in life because He came to be with us, to live amongst us in the perfect service of love; He was given up to us in death because He died for us; He gives Himself up to us in the Holy Eucharist because His love compels Him. His delights are with the sons of men.¹

The oblation of our Lord for all men did not cease upon the Cross, but continues in the Memorial of His Offering in the Sacrifice of the Mass. He abides

¹ Cf. Prov. viii. 31.

with His Church in the Blessed Sacrament, and by His Presence extends the very purpose of His life among men. He attracts, He converts, He consoles, He inspires those whose souls in any way respond to the reality of His Presence; while in Communion we are called to a high appreciation of our own share in His life. It is through sacramental union with Him that we attain to a just sense of our obligations towards our fellow-christians. He would have us become one with Himself in the utter concern of love for all men in the spirit of His Own Self-oblation.

II

Let us here consider our own use of this gift of the Holy Ghost. It goes to the root of our profession as children of God. The practice of our religion is the great concern of our life. We give attention to details of Catholic observance. We are regular and frequent in Communion. Our Prayer is ordered with considerable care. We practise certain special devotions. And we do all this in a spiritual way, with more or less sustained intention. We endeavour so to correspond to the love of God in prayer and duty as to attain to a perfect knowledge of Him according to His desire towards us. But experience proves to us our weakness in that very intention. We may even sink into a condition of complacency,

of self-contentment. Satisfied with the present, we may fail to look beyond it, or examine our motives. We may be outwardly and in practice religious, while permitting great interior imperfection. There is so much that is good in our spiritual life; also there is much that we need to learn of the more hidden ways of God by which He wills to lead us to the perfection He desires in us. And when He finds a soul failing in this, although really loving Him, He will compel that one, through the very circumstances of life, to look into itself. We may perhaps recall occasions when we have been compelled to look into our own lives, and have learned the truth about ourselves: that we were not as perfect as we imagined, but rather weak, defiled by sin, stained by contact with evil, inconsistent, halting, failing. Ah, then the vision of the self, of the life imperfect, of the spiritual disorder, is not beautiful. It is full of those secret revelations before which the soul is abased within itself. It is a time of pain unutterable to one who is sincere in meeting it; of interior loneliness; a time when no other soul can help us, for no one can behold us as we behold ourselves; but *only God*, and He seems to lead the soul yet farther into the wilderness. And the wilderness is desolate, lonely, dry, and often dark! But it will yet "*blossom as the rose.*"¹ For He saith, "*Behold, I will allure her,*

¹ Isa. xxxv. 1.

*and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her."*¹ The same mystic truth underlies many prophetic passages. The comfort is for those who will follow Him into the wilderness, not by compulsion, but in the willingness of love. We must know the lonely wilderness before we can experience the full Divine comfort. We must realize ourselves if we would fully experience the tender love of God. Like Israel of old we discover our spiritual needs in treading the wilderness way.

And first we discover the need of a great love wherewith to respond to God. It is not that we have no love, for then we should have no feeling of our need; but we are overwhelmed by the greatness of that which alone is worthy of being offered to God. Somehow we are at fault in that very matter of love. We did not realize it when all was easy; but here in the wilderness we perceive it as that which constitutes the unspeakable desolation; for there is nothing worse than an absence of love. And here we want love, and yet more love; for God is making a demand upon us that seems too great for our love. We cry for very poorness and ineffectiveness of love. We even try to force our love to reach that point of giving, and to answer to that imperative call. We will to love in response to the revelation; but so great

¹ Hosea ii. 14. Cf. also Isa. xxxv. 1-6; xli. 18, 19; xlii. 11; xliii. 19, 20.

is His love, we cannot overtake its demands. Only as we understand the deep love of the Sacred Heart can we realize what the demand means. Wonderful it is that God should make such a demand; but it is a revelation of a certain truth of love in the Divine Nature. In God there is something akin to the hunger for love in the human soul. It is one of the mysteries of the Divine life that God should desire—yea, demand—yea, plead for the love of His creatures. When we hear His command, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,*”¹ let us recall this fact of Divine tenderness—He loves, and desires to be loved.

And so it goes on. And we cannot rest because we feel we are not satisfying Him. The soul that is satisfied with its giving, is really giving but little. If it would satisfy God it must give, and be ever giving more, although as it feels the demand it will accuse itself of not loving. And this contest between God and the soul in the wilderness way will continue, may be, for some time, the soul suffering, yet never escaping the pressure of His demands. But He leaves us not. We could almost make the words of the Prophet our own as we read the third chapter of the Lamentations. They present in vivid expression the modes of Divine discipline through which we may be led to understand the deep requirements

¹ Deut. vi. 5.

of His love. God seems to compel the soul to taste the very dregs of its own wretchedness. Is there anything to a soul so wretched as the knowledge of its own lack of love?

But the soul that can suffer thus really loves; and God Who *knows* gives the necessary light, not always abundantly, but sufficient for the guidance of the soul. Our part is to be still in His hand while He works His will in us, purifying our souls. Already we know why we are not at rest, *not satisfying* Him. We do not love enough. We long to love worthily. Look into that one fact. There is something for us to do. *We must make a complete surrender of the will to God.* Then let us accept the discipline at His hand, aspiring always to that perfection which He desires, because we are longing to give Him the satisfaction He seeks, and not afraid, because through it we attain to love. Let there be no more of self, no more looking two ways, no further resistance, but a full acceptance of His will—not a grudging assent to a specific form of suffering, but the full correspondence to His will in the hard way of the Cross. God wills our perfection, and we must will it with Him. The soul that loves, and God Who loves, must be one in the purpose of interior perfection. Let us through all pain and discipline discern this simple truth: above the pain we feel He is seeking a certain clear beauty of perfection in the soul He

loves. We are weak and mistrustful, and can bear so little. Not so the loving God. His love is so great that He can bear to see us suffer under His hand rather than permit us to lose the eternal joy of His love.

Would we have full proof of this? There must, then, be the sinking of the whole content of life into the abyss of His love. This is the satisfaction He desires. That given, there is no longer a barrier between the soul and Him when we try to make our acts of love. But this surrender, this abandonment to love, this recognition of His will as the satisfaction of love to ourselves, must be made *where we are*, not in some other condition, not where we may be to-morrow, or next year, or any other time. Each soul finds its own pain in the wilderness, and it is *within that pain*, the pain proper to ourselves, that we are to begin to find the joy of His love.

First we must accept the particular pain, and recognize His will in it; and with it His desire to meet us in it. We must be wholly given to Him in loving acceptance, renouncing every claim of self, forsaking every complaint, enduring with loving patience the distress and pain of the wilderness, and then we shall find God in it. He is so near, but we find Him not, see Him not, because we are unwilling to allow the necessity of suffering. We should be less surprised when God disciplines us if we were more intent upon perfecting our love.

Let love find itself in self-giving. This very suffering is by God's will for us that we may be purified, made strong to gaze upon the higher vision of His love. We must sink into the depths of His love, dark depths to us at the first, but dark only because we cannot bear the light of love, and in our pain we think it is not love. Oh, how blind we are! how doubting!—and yet did not He say, “*I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her*”? Comfort is found when we follow the leading. We shall not find it if we refuse to enter the wilderness, for then we should forsake Him.

When we are so surrendered and the self is lost in God, there comes a new sense of love. There is no separation from Him; but a new intimacy of love in openness and peace—the peace of His will. He comforts not by restoring the old way, but by raising us to a new height, to newer hopes and aspirations. We are taught the higher way of union of will with God. We are thus admitted to the very life of the Son of God Whose joy it was to do the Father's will. Our life henceforth must tend wholly to Him. This was the piety of Jesus. This is it which the Holy Spirit of piety, or godliness, produces in the soul of good-will. In the very Spirit of our Lord we too may say in the fullness of our hearts: “*Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.*”

And yet how long it takes to realize so much in

ourselves ! In our prayer we may approach it, realize it as a present help, a light upon some dark passage of life, a revelation of God's way for us. Be humble, submissive in love, and He will make love's way only the more certain, and illumine the days with the light of the glory of His Own love. He will guide the faithful soul towards the perfect union of will with Himself, by means of which He can impart the very secrets of His Own love, and prepare the soul for the predestined glory of the Saints.

There is yet the other thought of piety—the rightful attitude of the soul towards all mankind, not only to those near and dear to us, but, after the example of our Lord, *towards all men*. When the soul is at rest in the Divine will, when its habitual intention is to correspond wholly to that will in love, there grows within it a holy charity towards others. And this charity becomes more and more like that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Freshly aroused to the perception of His love, we perceive within ourselves the faultiness of our secret dispositions, our thoughts and feelings, in relation to others. Our love was found wanting towards God. It will certainly also be found wanting towards others.

We should contemplate our Lord in His relation to others : His great courtesy, His tenderness, His regard for their spiritual needs, His ready allowance for human weakness, His encouragements, His com-

mands, His rebukes. He seemed to keep always in view the way by which each might give glory to His Father. This was true piety. He brought out the best in each; inspired each to do better; opened the way to the very highest, while watching carefully the first steps. As the vision of the highest may be discerned from the first step of the upward way, He always imparted to the simplest teaching something of the sublime perfection of the highest. He gave Himself not only *for each*, but also *to each*. He made for each and all the supreme act of love on Calvary. He did not ask who they were who would reject that love, but gave it freely. And what He thus did on Calvary, He does still in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. He gives love continually. He is wholly given to us. He comes to us in that Holy Sacrament, putting Himself afresh and unreservedly into our hands. That Sacrament is not a mere symbol of His presence, but His very Self given to us. There could be no act of love at once so simple and so mighty. It is ungrudging love. It is love ever pleading with us for a response worthy of its greatness.

And this is the measure proposed to us who are partakers of life in that Holy Sacrament. He comes to us, unites Himself to us, not only for what that blessing may be to ourselves, but also that through us He may speak to others. He sets up for us a standard of service, of charity, to which we may ever

be reaching; and yet we may never feel we have attained it. It is so intimate a matter, so really a part of our life in Christ, that we understand it best when apart and alone in prayer. Some points in this holy work of charity to which the Holy Spirit of piety inclines us may, however, be noticed here.

1. The *watchfulness* necessary if we would keep from all censoriousness, unkindness, open or secret, hardness and lack of sympathy, impatience, jealousy, malice, and evil-mindedness.

2. The *love* needful in the opposite of all these. Yea, it is love, not first of all towards persons, but towards God, for Whose sake we are moved when we find anything in others that does not reflect His love, or manifest the working of His grace.

3. The *ready charity* which can perform spiritual acts *for* those in whom we perceive these things—such as prayer for enemies, and those who offend us; acts of intercession when we are hurt by the words and acts of others; prayer for strangers, and for those who have no outward claims, as well as for those who are dependent upon us; the offering of intentions, as at Mass; the making of Communion for others; the offering of acts of penitence or other devotions for them; and all because we are one with our Lord Whose remembrance of these very souls is constant.

4. The *patient charity* which continues in all this after the example of our Lord in the Holy Sacrament.

The great work which our Lord came to do must be shared by all the members of His Mystical Body, particularly by those closest to Him in the bond of love. His patient abiding in the Blessed Sacrament cannot be fully expressed. And because we are in sacramental union with Him, He wills us also to be patient, constant, overlooking the faults of others because we share in His desire for the salvation of their souls. And this is a very real part of the piety which regards the high honour and praise of our Father in Heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ.

III

Let us now consider how we are assisted in our prayer by the same Holy Spirit of Godliness, or Piety. We think of the wonderful prayers of our Lord. His Human will was so perfectly one with the Divine in Him, that His prayer was the perfect communion of the Son with the Father. The ecstasy of His Sacred Humanity in the sublime unity of His Person, although at no time suspended, was in His prayer so utterly free that we contemplate in Him an absorption in prayer beyond that of the greatest of the Saints. In Him this spirit or gift of piety is seen resplendent in the glory of unimpeded love with the Father. On one occasion, at least, He allowed this to appear for the consolation of the chosen three.

The Transfiguration was in one sense a revelation of the Incarnate Son in prayer.

In ourselves, as that same gift is perfected, there will be a more intimate communion and understanding between the soul and God. Self-will renounced, the Divine will embraced and desired, the limitless view of Divine love disclosed : that love which enters and fills and bears up the soul so soon as it is submissive to the Divine will, desires it and obeys it, also enables us to contemplate the Divine energy of love ; yea, to be even taken itself into living co-operation with that energy. This we experience in our prayer according to the degree of our love, as forsaking all self-seeking and self-loving, we are united to God, finding our centre in Him. To be one with Him in the energy of love is to know a divine joyousness of life.

At times, indeed, we may not feel at all like co-operating with this love, we are but passive beneath the wondrous sense of its greatness ; but that is, perhaps, natural when we first perceive how Divine love is realized only through acceptance of the Divine will. But love cannot long remain inactive in any soul, and the first response is the beginning of co-operation.

The deep experiences of the Saints in prayer, in work and in suffering reveal the many aspects of our co-operation, and show also the glory and boundlessness of that to which God has raised us. They also make

plain to us that impulsion towards the highest which is always felt when the soul has experience of God.

It would be well when our prayers are dull, and our souls heavy, to look to this submission of the will and renew it, and let our love once more glow with revived freshness. We shall need this often in the difficult days of our earthly life, when in prayer alone we are able to discern the higher paths of submission and loving abandonment to the love which does not always disclose its hidden purpose. There will be days when in blind submission our love must attain to the strength required for the perfect vision; or, what is equally necessary, strength against the greater tests to which it may yet be subjected. These days of present trial are but leading to that last and greatest of which the Saints warn us—through which may God bring us to the glory of His Own love.

But if there be days of suffering there are also days of joy, and in them, too, we are to discern the revelation of the perfect will of God. We need the sacred gift of godliness no less for its understanding in the day of happiness, than in the seasons of heaviness. It is a great grace to be able to look through to the light of spiritual joy with selfless regard for the high purpose of the loving will of God, to desire not the mere continuance of delights, but the completeness of work, of sacrifice, of life itself in the consummation of that purpose. We may not pause, nor rest, if we

would perfectly respond to the Holy Spirit in the use of His Gift of Godliness.

IV

And then, what of the life hereafter? What of the understanding of love between the Saint and God? In Heaven the gifts of the Holy Ghost will be resplendent in the soul that has used them well. May we not contemplate a soul in whom this gift of godliness has become fruitful through the discipline of earth looking into the depths of Divine love, praising God for the manifestation of His will, so often embraced in simple faith, now seen in the grandeur of a Divine conception, as sweet, as tender, as it is strong and eternal? There are many wonders to be revealed in that world of light and life, but already the Key is placed in our hands. We are preparing for the fullness of light as often as we rise in the strength of this sacred gift of Piety to the joy of submission, to the peace of the Divine will.

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O Eternal Father in Whose will we find our peace; grant us to use the Holy Spirit's gift of piety, that we may ever as Thy true children both do those things which are pleasing to Thee, and also serve our neighbour in charity for Thy sake, after the example of Thine only Son Jesus Christ; Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

IV

The Gift of Knowledge

I

LET us contemplate the Incarnate Lord in the fullness of His knowledge. He was endowed as to His Human Nature with the Spirit of Knowledge. As to His Divine Nature He was one with the Father in the limitless knowledge, and essential understanding of eternal Divine love. But He received the gift of the Spirit of Knowledge, as the Son of Man, as a part of that spiritual endowment which is proper to all men in a state of grace. In our Lord as Man we may see every spiritual gift that is necessary to the perfection of the human soul. In Him this gift is, like all other gifts of the Spirit in Him, to be contemplated in its perfection. *We* must increase unto perfection through the use of every gift; but in Him they were perfect from the beginning.

Every gift of the Holy Ghost is illuminative; but this gift of knowledge marks the point at which they appear more directly as gifts of light. If the earlier gifts of Holy Fear and Godliness may be

regarded in particular as proper to the Purgative Way, this and others will appear as proper to the Illuminative Way. How glorious is the light of this gift in the Human Soul of Jesus! It is the undimmed light of eternal truth. It is the knowledge in which the Divine and the Human in Him were one in sustained ecstasy of love; for in this knowledge love and not intellect takes the higher place. When we consider this gift we remember its relation to all knowledge; and in giving the higher place to love we refer all knowledge to that Divine beatitude wherein God possesses all knowledge within His Own essential love. No knowledge is so complete, so wholly spiritual as that of love. It is God's Own prerogative communicated by the Holy Ghost to the spirit of man. We are thus enabled to know God, to perceive truth, to embrace it, and rejoice in it, to rejoice even with God in His unspeakable joy in living truth.

All this was in the Human Soul of Jesus. It was light and power and joy. Its supernatural glow must often have impressed those about Him.¹ It was as a heavenly ray falling amid the shadows of human ignorance and folly vaunting itself as wisdom. Truly He came as *the* "Light of the World."

¹ Cf. S. Matt. xiii. 54; S. Luke iv. 22; S. John vi. 45; viii. 45-47.

II

And this gift is to us also; we possess it; the Holy Spirit of Knowledge dwells within the soul a true spiritual endowment. It is as light within the soul, as clear and true as a lamp within the sanctuary. It illuminates the whole wide field of knowledge. It is a clear and steady light, a supernatural beam which grows but brighter as it is lovingly followed. If there are shadows, if we discern only half-lights, if to us the rays of this light are uncertain, be sure the reason is to be looked for in ourselves. The light of the Spirit of Knowledge is *itself* clear. We must steadfastly desire it and follow it.

The first necessity is *preparedness of soul*. The light of Holy Fear guided us in the way of penitence. What darkness was cleared away from the soul humbly contrite, and confessing its sin, when the grace of absolution sealed the cleansing by the Precious Blood! How much clearer then is the spiritual outlook. The soul looked right on to God. There was no longer anything to hide Him, or to dull the apprehension of His presence. The darkness was past, and the true light shone once more.

The light of the gift of Godliness guided us to the very Heart of the Father, showed us the beauty of His will, and cheered us with the vision of His loving

purpose. But at that point, when in prayer we realized the wonder of the love which drew us into itself, we knew we were not at the end; we knew ourselves to be but at the beginning, and we could not rest there. The very depths and heights called to us. We longed to *know* more. Thus were we prepared for the action of this light of Divine knowledge.

This knowledge is first of all concerned with God Himself and with all that we may know of ourselves in His presence: "God and myself," as Dr. Newman used often to say. It is something intimate, holy, wonderful, and full of peace, because it is essentially of love. Beginning at some well-defined moment of experience, in some cases, it is renewed again and again, but always with a sense of increasing depth as the soul shares the secret of love with God. The knowledge of God is always to some extent a secret between Himself and the soul He loves. Thus it is the beginning of that which lies within the often misunderstood attitude of the Saints: "My secret to myself." What is that but a degree of the knowledge of God peculiar to the person, and incommunicable to others? It is always as a light shining out from the soul as it approaches God, a light which, the more we use it, penetrates the very splendour of His majesty, and reveals the mystery of His Being, His love. It is this because it is the gift of

the Holy Ghost Who makes known to us "*the deep things of God.*"

It is a supernatural light by means of which we may look upon the light of God: "*in Thy light shall we see light.*" As a Divine gift within us it shines out from the soul into the light of God.

But this wonderful light of knowledge does not perfectly illuminate our way without the aid of the two previous lights. The soul that would know perfectly all that may be known by the light of the Holy Spirit of Knowledge must be often cleansed and renewed, must often aspire to union of purpose with God; and then the light of the Holy Ghost will overspread the entire inner life. We shall distinguish "what is of God from what is of the creature, what is solid from what is vain and imaginary, and what is truly great from what only appears to be great, although not so in reality."¹ If we are sincere in following this light, we shall often have reason to thank God: we shall perceive continually how this gift of the Holy Ghost assists grace, as we are inclined more and more often to avoid an evil, correct an imperfection, attempt some better thing, aspire to some virtue, to glory in the love of God, to adore Him in the multiplicity of His loving acts towards us. We shall feel that this sacred gift assists us in all these ways, because we are moved

¹ Ullathorne: *Christian Patience*, Lect. ix.

to these acts by reason of all that we perceive and apprehend through its agency.

And yet further, this light of knowledge when it falls thus upon the field of moral action, tends likewise to illuminate the way of Catholic truth. The soul of good-will, guarding the ways of moral action, is readier for the helps afforded by the Catholic faith and practice. Right belief is seen in true relation to right conduct. This is important. Even exterior works that appear good may be valueless unless there be the right interior disposition. While recognizing the good that may attach to natural virtues, we must remember that they cannot raise the soul above nature; we need supernatural grace in order to rise to any degree of merit.

By this light of knowledge our devotional acts—yea, every proper act of religion—are understood in relation to spiritual needs. There is a certain knowledge of Divine things, the result of multiplied experiences, which makes the inner life of some very rich indeed. It is the overflowing through all the avenues of spirit of that rich pure light which flows from the eternal light of God into the soul that uses the sacred gift—the spirit of knowledge. In one sense it is the realization within the soul of the gift itself; in another it is the superadded richness with which God rewards the diligent user.

How great is the interest which then attaches to

the everyday practice of our religion when we find in each detail its own spiritual significance. There are days when everything is hard, days of suffering of body or of spirit, days when it seems impossible to bear with patience a depressing sense of powerlessness which amounts even to weakness most difficult to overcome. Then let us remember the grace of past days, and rest confident that it will be renewed. We should use the knowledge gained in the past, and so bear with ourselves and with the painfulness of the days as to attain to a new sense of love, a deeper knowledge of the ways of God.

Does it seem impossible to us, as we live through the dark days, to seek to know God better? We often spend such days amiss because we imagine there can be no good in them. We resent their darkness, or are so bewildered by it, that the light of Divine knowledge is sadly obscured within us. The obscuration is due to our own faultiness. We forget our own spiritual endowment. But if remembering the gift we bring it to bear upon the darkness, we shall discern very much that it concerns us to learn for our spiritual advancement which could not be known save through the very trial or difficulty of the moment. The gift itself must be proved under all conditions, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost Whose gift it is. The Divine gift of knowledge is not only given that we may respond to all

occasions with desire for the deep knowing of God; but also that, knowing within ourselves that we have the gift, we may the more earnestly use it.

This holy gift of knowledge, being of the Holy Ghost, also sanctifies all science rightly understood. All truth is of God. Although we distinguish between sacred and secular learning, yet both are of God; He should be the end of our seeking in both. To the Christian these two departments of learning are mutually helpful. The wonders of nature, the secrets of natural order which students are discovering from day to day, are as rays of the lamp of divine knowledge shining in secret places. The devout soul will know the presence of God, and will adore. With S. John of the Cross he will see in every beauty—yea, in the very surprises of Nature, the tokens of His presence and power, or the evidence of His “passing.”¹ The Saint by that word seems to imply a certain procession of Divine glory, as the Creator passed from one thing to another, leaving on each the impress of His Own beauty. It is also interesting as an indication of a saintly mind concerned with everything, whether material or spiritual, that may contribute to our knowledge of God, and assist us in praising Him.

In all these the loving soul perceives the footprints of her Beloved. They witness to His near-

¹ *S. John of the Cross, Sptl. Cant. viii. 7.*

ness, His beauty and His power. They awaken within her the longings of a great love, the desire to know more because she perceives the wondrous generosity of His love, and is led through contemplation to more profound adoration. She would love Him, adore Him, delight in Him, simply for His Own sake in the admiration of love. We are in the presence of luminous mysteries of Divine power and wisdom; but the attraction is all to Him. It is He Himself Who is perceived in the glory of love. We are beholding with delight some particularly beautiful scene in Nature: it is not merely the outward beauty which attracts us, but that which we may venture to call the spirit of the whole scene that gives us pleasure. What is that but the Spirit of God animating His creation. The Divine love finds infinitely varied modes of expression through Nature. Its commonplaces no less than its secrets declare Him. "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handy-work.*"¹

III

Such, then, are the uses of the gift of the Spirit of Knowledge. We pass now to that which is the highest, because the most spiritual, of the uses of knowledge. When we consider its particular value

¹ Ps. xix. 1.

in our prayer we are at once translated to the region of its most pure action in this life; for prayer is best conceived of as the high action and intercourse of the soul with God in love. It is difficult for some to rise to any idea of prayer that is not concerned with needs and petitions. But it is more than this. Love is concerned with its object more than with itself, and all knowledge of its Object is used as a means of ascent as the soul contemplates the Beloved. As therefore we pass from one step to another in the ascent of prayer, knowledge is increased. We mount Godwards, and there are granted to us certain intuitions of God and of Divine things. Sacred knowledge is infused. But everything is of love. And all knowledge we gain is an inner experience of love. And this, which is true of the general course of prayer, is true likewise of separate occasions of prayer. We may begin to pray, using our mental powers very carefully and well; and yet not all at once do we find what we seek. But as we apply ourselves more and more in love, the spirit is more free, and withal more conscious of God. We give ourselves in love to Him, and find Him generous, and in a divine manner eager towards us; and in that meeting of love we are renewed in some clearness of intuition, or guided towards some deeper knowledge of Divine love. It will be seen at once that time is needed for this. It is not good to be

hurried in prayer; but when it is possible to give fuller time (*e. g.* an hour) to mental prayer, we should do so. We may be so guided and assisted in this prayer, our effort be so blessed, that without delay we may be regularly taken into affective prayer. And then the sacred gift of knowledge will glow more brightly as an interior light.

It is not the prayer of the intellect only that results in the deepest satisfaction to the soul that desires to know God; although we know how greatly blessed such prayer often is. It is affective prayer, sometimes connected with that of the intellect, and sometimes independent of it, which exalts the soul to some higher knowledge, and contents it in God. That is why great souls, proficient in prayer, know God more profoundly than others. By great souls we do not mean such as are eminently learned or great in the estimation of the world; but rather who are great in love, and they are more often hidden souls, humble and silent. We should not dare to consider *ourselves* great in spiritual ways; but the great souls of whom we are thinking are just the humble, profoundly loving souls we desire ourselves to be. And so we have this holy assurance: if we are in humility thus forsaking self, and in love aspiring only to God, there is for us the hope of all this deep knowing of God.

This knowledge must depend very much upon our

own action in preparing for it. It may not be easy to secure time for the stillness and silence of love when so many things conspire to move us from it. It may even appear to some as a waste of time, if no fruit of the hours can be seen. But the contrary is the truth. We really learn much of God in the silent prayer of love. One day He will reveal to us the treasure of knowledge which He has imparted—and we shall be glad. And when we can be still, in the deep realization of love between ourselves and God, when in growing union with our Lord Beloved we are able through each gift of the Holy Ghost within ourselves to penetrate more deeply the mysteries of His Sacred Heart, there are opened to us avenues of sacred knowledge which we may at least contemplate. As the Sacred Heart of our Lord holds infinite treasures of knowledge, so as He holds us in living love with Himself, we may look as He enables us to those far distances which, though limitless in extent as we contemplate them, are yet to Him immediate and near in the boundlessness of His Own life and love. We aspire to knowledge : He possesses it wholly. To us it is a looking into the distance ; to Him the boundlessness of immediate possession.

But what infinite mercy is this that we, with all our imperfect love, can be thus taken in Him to such contemplation ! Is it not on His part the

very condescension of love? He asks no more than this: *Do we love Him?* Given the love, He will act towards us according to the degree of that love, and give just so much as our love can bear; and growing love means increasing strength. This is of utmost value to us. We do but waste time and thought while vainly regretting our weakness, or possibly comparing our apparent poverty with the equally apparent richness of another soul. Rather let us persevere in love; let us go to our prayer loving simply to the full power of our souls. We shall grow in love, and through love to deeper knowledge. We have the gift, the power, the requisite faculty: let us be faithful, let us stir up the gift that *is in us*, and the illumination of Divine knowledge will not be withheld.

IV

This sacred gift, the Holy Spirit of Knowledge, after all the present experience of love, will have its eternal value. As a habit it will not cease, because the soul carries into eternity all its spiritual endowments. The light of Divine knowledge must *then*, in the other life, glow with a glorious radiance the more beautiful as we have attained to the knowledge of God here. We might well consider the Angels, each in their degree, knowing God through the perfection of love, pure spirits offering no

obstruction to the pure inflowing of Divine light. They are so constituted that they receive, retain and show forth again the light of God. But when we turn to the Saints we perceive more truly the nature of that life of love and worship wherein the gifts of the Holy Ghost are resplendent. They are in union with the Incarnate Lord, in Whom all these gifts were by the Holy Ghost infused in their perfection in His Sacred Humanity. The Saints are by their love rendered marvellously like Him. Transformed in love they respond to all the attractions of Divine life after the manner of His response. Every gift of the Spirit in them glows with its own brightness as they, responding in love, are guided by the Holy Ghost to the profoundest depths of knowledge, or to the heights of rapturous knowing of the most High God.

Let us look out from the intuitions of love granted to us here to those heights presented as we contemplate the Saints in their love and service. If here on earth we know the call of the Beloved: "*Come with Me,*"¹ then that very call has its eternal counterpart. The Saints "*follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.*"² If while on earth they were called to follow Him from height to height as He found them prepared and capable in love, what of His call then? What inconceivable knowledge, the

¹ Cant. iv. 8.

² Rev. xiv. 4.

knowledge of eternal love, eternal wisdom, of His Own Sacred Heart, of themselves as the eternally chosen of His love !

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O Everlasting God, Whom to know is everlasting life; confirm in us both the gift of knowledge, and also the will to use it always according to the loving purpose of the Holy Ghost Whose gift it is; and grant both the perfection of it here in this life, and also the glory of it in the life to come. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

V

The Gift of Strength

I

LET us contemplate our Incarnate Lord in the greatness of His spiritual strength. While with the poet we hail Him, "Strong Son of God, immortal Love,"¹ let us also adore Him with knowledge and understanding of His strength. We contemplate not only His Divine strength, but also, and in particular, that strength which appertained to His Sacred Manhood through the resting upon Him of the Holy Ghost. His was the gift and Spirit of Strength. It was ever perfect in Him. We mark its presence in Him by its effect upon His words and acts. As we behold Him, we perceive nothing that is not perfectly expressed in humility, gentleness, forbearance, compassion, patience, on the one hand; and on the other in firmness, truth, zeal for righteousness, indignation, steadfast determination. But as we observe the successive changes of expression, we mark no change in Him. He is not moved from His habitual charity. He is ever the same, gracious and

¹ Tennyson.

winning. And although in one place His anger is mentioned,¹ it is at once associated with His grief—thus the love shines forth. Behind and within all this we recognize His strength. In the Saints every virtue presupposes grace by which the will is inclined towards good. But greater than the virtues are the gifts of the Holy Ghost which correspond to them. If they are strong in the virtues, it is by reason of the gifts, because they are of God, and survive all temporal exercise of the virtues. We contemplate in our Lord Beloved the perfection of the gifts. As His holy will was directed to the perfect achievement of love through each detail of life, we do not mark one act or word without the thought of the perfect strength within it. So we say of Him, He is gentle, meek, and compassionate because He is *strong*. And so of every other expression of Himself, He is this, and that, because He is *strong*.

Oh, this strength of our Lord Beloved! It is never hard, always tender; towards sin unyielding, towards the sinner melting with compassion; calm and still in His Own suffering, but full of sympathy with another in sorrow. Such is the strength of Jesus. And such we prove it to be when in our own experience of necessity, or suffering, or contrition, we seek the sympathy of His Sacred Heart.

¹ S. Mark iii. 5.

Perhaps in our weakness and fear we would by seeking Him hope to evade some hardness, or escape discipline; but as we are touched by His loving compassion we feel His strength; and we know that we are unworthy of such love while we encourage our own weakness. If we realize His strength, we, too, desire to be made strong in love, for we perceive, however dimly, the possibility of union with Him when we are strong. Happy shall we be if we are faithful to that perception of the truth as it affects ourselves; for the Holy Spirit's gift of strength is to be perfected through life's discipline.

II

From all we perceive in our Lord we may understand the nature of the gift imparted to the Christian by the Holy Spirit of Strength. It may be rightly considered as a gift for the Unitive Way. When we know the needs and dangers of the spiritual life, when by the light of Divine knowledge we survey that way with all its alluring prospects, when we contemplate the heights of love's ascent, we must feel our weakness. "Who is sufficient?" Who is there who has not at times been appalled by the length of the way, or by the height to which they are called in love? Who, then, is sufficient? Not ourselves as we are, certainly. But as we look

within, and try to estimate aright our spiritual endowment with holy purposefulness, we know that although we are "*not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves*"; yet, we need not fear, for "*our sufficiency is of God.*"¹ He has given the needed Strength. The Holy Spirit of Strength dwells within us, and in realization of the gift the soul may say, "*I will go in the strength of the Lord God.*"² And this going in strength is not an uncertain movement; we go in strength, guided in action by the light of Divine knowledge.

Every ray of light as it falls upon our spiritual pathway reveals the need of strength. At every step we must practise some virtue, and not in a merely natural way; but in a supernatural way as we use Divine gifts and respond to Divine grace. At every step we are conscious of weakness. We cannot by the practice of natural virtues attain to the perfection of a saint. We are not the humble, brave, faithful souls we wish to be. We have not perfect charity.³ Knowing good and desiring it, we yet fail through weakness, or want of resolution. We could take S. Paul's lament as expression of our own sense of the conflict within us.⁴ How many feel this, and how the enemy tries to alarm us. He would take us at some disadvantage, suggest that

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

² Ps. lxxi. 16.

³ 1 Cor. xiii.

⁴ Rom. vii. 15.

we have not strength for the fight. He would make us fail through fear. He can only appeal to what is natural to us, while our strength lies in that which is supernatural.

But no life is wholly within the shadow of weakness. There are happier times when we do correspond to grace, and use our gifts, and find joy in them. And these times are to become more and more our happiness. They are times of realized strength, such as we have known when we have made some definite response to grace; or when we have yielded to some sudden impulsion to goodness; or when we have made some sacrifice of self, or performed some work of charity; or when we have done anything for the love of God. What was then the truth we recognized? Love was ruling us. We felt its strength and power. It was the fruit of the Holy Spirit's gift of strength.

We have felt our weakness as we have really striven after perfection in any direction; it is an experience which tests our striving. Or we have aspired to the height of love, longing only to be strong enough to stand upon some mountain of vision, and we have felt the need of inward spiritual strength to stand upright. We have known the weakness in which we stood unready for the vision, or for some desired degree of union with our Lord. He may even have exalted us to some step in the ascent of perfection from which we seemed to have fallen back immediately. The

moment of exaltation cheered us. Did we lose the joy of it through inability to stand at so high a point? It may have been so; and we may have been distressed at our failure. Yet that moment was given to *encourage* and not to dishearten us. It is true that all such experiences reveal the blemishes in our character, and make us afraid because of our sinfulness;¹ but also they show the will and purpose of God towards us. We have but to practise ourselves in the gifts we have received, and we shall prepare, not only to see the height again, but also stand securely upon it.

Again, there are times when the inner light is greatly obscured; when the light of knowledge is hidden because God Himself seems to withdraw from us the power of seeing. The light of the Holy Spirit's gifts is not darkened, but our powers are suspended. This is not the time for fear, but for the exercise of faith. God is working, and we must understand, and work with Him. The gift of ghostly strength is independent of light, and we are to know and use it. This is important. The seasons of darkness when encouragements fail are not times when we should show only weakness. We must use the gift of strength. It will be our great need in all times of spiritual darkness, for it will support us in the exercise of the great virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. In all such seasons

¹ Cf. Isa. vi. 5; Dan. x. 17.

of trial those virtues should be manifest in great strength. How wonderful this interior strength may be is revealed in the Saints, who after seasons of trial and desolation were recipients of great graces; and no one can advance to them who is not strong. Thus they were seen to have gained—the discipline was fruitful. If we use the Spirit's gift of strength aright we, too, shall profit by our own seasons of trial. Indeed, without trial the virtues are never perfected. And yet how readily content we are with weakness of soul if we can escape the trial. But surely we have not understood the Holy Spirit's gifts if that be true of us in any degree.

Again, when we recognize the necessity of pain and discipline, and are willingly submitting ourselves to trial; when we perceive in every call to endurance the opportunity which love can embrace; when we can look to the end, passing by the natural love of ease, we are really preparing for the great evidence of virtue which declares the Saint. We do not regard ourselves with any complacence, as though we were already holy. We must take S. Paul as our guide: *“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are*

before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."¹ There is something still beyond us, a height to be gained, a vision to behold, a glory of sanctity to be won. Yes, and very likely, also, some supreme test of virtue to be met. The Holy Spirit of strength seeing our effort, and rewarding it with love, will not withhold from us the test.

This is a serious thought, and it may well arrest us. The Holy Spirit Who endows the soul will test its strength. We are very apt to desire and even expect the reward without the test. But perfection is the result of testing. We can do so much to prove the gift by our own faithfulness to love, that no test will find us wholly unprepared, although it may be beyond our expectations. God Himself directs the testing, and the more eager we are in the way of perfection the more severe will be His testing, for His desire for our perfection is equalled only by His love for us.

How did the Saints give proof of the strength of the Holy Ghost in themselves? By displaying the virtues in some heroic degree. Martyrs, Confessors, and countless hidden and scarcely known Saints, in their several ways were strong to that sublime degree. At some points of their lives, openly before the world, or secretly in their silence and hiddenness, they met some supreme demand of love with a corresponding

¹ Phil. iii. 12-14.

heroism of love in the virtues. If one virtue was more evident than another in the heroism of their actions, it was not because of any separateness from other virtues, for all are necessary to the perfection of each; thus showing that the perfection of any virtue consists in love which is the beginning and end of all the virtues.

This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's gift to us—strength equal to the greatest demands. Then if we are called to bear some great test, we shall not fail, but rather through the test attain to greater power of love, for it is in love that we show how strong a soul may be. This Divine gift of strength has made conquerors of naturally weak and shrinking souls. The Divine strength is made perfect through human weakness, not apart from it, but by raising the weak human soul to supernatural strength. We have but to recall the example of our Lady and the choirs of Virgin Saints, to assure ourselves that natural human weakness may be allied to the strength of God in a mighty act of love. What love uniting the soul to its Beloved may become as it is found in the virtues, is but expressed in the words of the Canticle. "*Thou art beautiful . . . terrible as an army with banners. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*"¹ Thus mystically is declared the strength of the soul

¹ Cant. vi. 4 and 10.

adorned with virtues, admired of Angels, and feared by the enemy.

III

This realization of the Holy Spirit's gift of strength begins, and is sustained, in our prayer. As the soul is renewed in love day by day in prayer, there grows within it the deep consciousness of the *might of love*. All God's working is by love, whether in nature or in grace; and the soul that returns to the contemplation of His love from day to day, can never for a moment separate His works from His love. His love, great and wonderful beyond our comprehension, and calm in its eternal strength, exalts us to higher conceptions of all it can be in ourselves. Our first ideas of His love are poor and unworthy; but He guides and teaches us as we are able to bear it, until our own love for Him becomes clearer and stronger, and we rejoice in the very strength which at first we feared. Our prayer may then become a daily exercise of developing strength within the deep consciousness of Divine love. But all such prayer will lead to action. The strength realized within the love will not fail to be exerted in manifold ways. And each action will have its own reward in love.

Strength thus realized in prayer will be also sustained in prayer. The daily renewal will be abundantly blessed; for the soul being more and more

identified with the Divine love, will become marvelously strong. It will be able to bear the graces which God may bestow. We must not make the mistake of supposing that every soul without distinction is able to receive the rich graces and gifts of God. It is not that He *will not* give, but that He *cannot* give, because souls are not strong enough for the experience. We have abundant evidence in the histories of souls. Many have been constrained to beseech Him to withhold His gifts because they felt they could bear no more. And they were proficient in prayer, men and women of undoubted holiness. God in His love towards them showered His graces so abundantly that it seemed to them beyond mortal power to sustain them. And doubtless it was so, but He Who gave also sustained the soul to bear them. Oh, when we are inclined to envy the Saints, let us rather humble ourselves because we are weak, and often through our own fault. We have not been ready, nor strong in love.¹

We should at least make the effort in the silence of our prayer to know this love, this strength, not for ourselves alone, but that we may give to God the high worship of love, the adoration which is His due. Why is worship so poor, adoration so fleeting? Why even at the Mass are these so often wanting? Why before the Blessed Sacrament are we unable to make an

¹ Cf. Jer. v. 25.

offering of love? Far back in the daily prayer lies the answer. We have not gained *strength*. They are the mightiest Angels who adore with fullest conception of His glory. They are the strongest Saints who prevail in love. Let us seek renewal in strength that we may pray, worship, and adore.

IV

If in this life we need so much the Holy Spirit's gift of strength, what will be our need in the life to come? The degree of the soul's union with God is ever according to its development in love. Every gift of the Holy Ghost is essentially a gift of love. And the gift of strength is only realized as love attains to the fullness of its power. So on earth we grow in that strength or power which, hereafter, we shall need for the higher exercises of the spirit. We are attracted by the vision of the promised glory of the Saints; we are charmed by the inspired descriptions of their state; the highly mystical language of the Apocalypse ¹ both veils and reveals the joys of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The vision is of unclouded brightness, of consummated love, and the hearts of the faithful turn towards it with unspeakable longing. But look more deeply, examine the details of revelation, mark the evident requirements of life there, and it will be

¹ Rev. xxi. and xxii.

evident at once that *for the life there* we shall need to be immensely *strong*, tremendously powerful. Every expression of life there is a response to the perfections of God; and for that how great must be the soul's strength! Moses, the friend of God, the great Prophet and Saint, could not look upon Him and live while yet in the flesh.¹ But *now* he can bear that vision. So we think of ourselves, weak even while we are growing in strength; too weak now to bear the vision; but growing in strength as lovingly we aspire to it, and correspond in daily action to the requirements of eternity.

Let us make now our response to God through each courageous act of love. He will reward with love—love that is strong, love that exalts to the vision, love that empowers for the vision. There it must surely be that the Saints are glorious in the virtues, beautiful in their perfection, and in the strength which, through their union with God, has no hardness, but only the calm stability of love. Even on earth they have shown this—how much more, then, in glory!

There is much for us to do here; but we must learn the necessities of the present in contemplation of the future. We shall prepare for the life to come by living now as citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is the saintly way. It is our Lord's way.

If we are to be strong in spirit after the purpose of

¹ Exod. xxxiii. 20.

the Holy Ghost in us, we must live in the light of eternity, aspiring to the standard of eternal requirements. So shall we gain strength, and be found at the last ready and capable for the life to which He will call us.

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Almighty and Everlasting God, by Whose gift alone we are made strong for the way of holiness; grant us so to use this gift that by reason of it we may be found at last able to bear the weight of the Heavenly glory which Thou hast promised to Thy faithful ones. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever. Amen.

VI

The Gift of Counsel

I

LET us contemplate in our Incarnate Lord the operation of the Holy Spirit of Counsel. We mark the perfection of the gift in Him. How clear and definite is the purpose towards which His whole life is directed. The Father's will, the purpose of eternal love, is perfectly realized within His consciousness. It is by no formal acquiescence that He is enabled to say, "*I do always those things that please Him,*"¹ but by reason of His identification with that purpose. If we may speak of it as a very glorious mental vision ever delighting Him, we may yet more truly say it was a very glorious life within which He lived; yea, it was even more, it was *the* very life by which He lived: "*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.*"² But while we contemplate in our Incarnate Lord the perfection of the gift of counsel, and know that in Him it is fixed and permanent, we are to mark its operation in His life, in words and actions. If any work or utterance of His be examined, we

¹ S. John viii. 29.

² S. John iv. 34.

discern a certain directness of intention. He wills only that purpose of love for which He came to us. We follow Him through all the days of His earthly life, we mark the ever-deepening sorrow of His Sacred Heart, until the shadows of the Passion were concentrated in the darkness of Calvary, and the bitter cry which broke the silence of the Dereliction declares His desolation; but we cannot discover a moment when the counsel of eternal love was not indicated. Not for an instant was His perfect following of that counsel in suspense; for He could say, "*the prince of this World cometh, and hath nothing in Me.*"¹ That implacable enemy would have found something in Him if for a moment there had been a suspension of His perfect willing. We have to contemplate Him as possessed of the holy counsel of God, making every thought and word and act expressive of that eternal counsel of love.

If we perceive so much in our Lord, we are led further to the understanding of a certain joy within His soul. There is a peculiar joy of love when we are really at one with God in will and desire, even though outwardly we are in pain and distress; for love has its own secret joy proportioned to the greatness of its achievement. The joy is in the work or act of loving, rather than in the fact of being loved.

It is a high Divine joy which is ours only as we

¹ S. John xiv. 30.

correspond to the inwardness of the love of God. We may observe it in the great Saints, in all who attain to likeness to their Lord. This, then, we contemplate in Him, a joy at all times in the conscious identification of His will, His love, with the will and love of the Father. We may even regard it as a part of that joy which is His in His now glorious life, a joy continually renewed because His Priestly intercession is sustained in the purposefulness of eternal love.

We do well to remember always that eternal love is working towards an end that is certain of accomplishment. We may not be able to see the end, or realize the grandeur of the Divine conception; but may perceive so much as will encourage and inspire us in the tedious and often dark ways of human life. The light of this sacred gift of counsel as we behold it in our Lord, is the same light of the Spirit which is also in ourselves. “*He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*”¹

II

This same gift of the Holy Spirit of Counsel is already within us who have been enriched in spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation. Looking upon it in our Lord we gain the first clear thought of its purpose in ourselves. It is the gift which enables

¹ S. John viii. 12.

us to perceive the will of God and to desire it for ourselves. Of all that is most difficult in the soul's life this must be accounted the hardest—the perfect identification of the human will with the Divine will. Really the whole conflict of the will is connected with that interior work. It is the work of life to become entirely surrendered. We could not attain to this unaided; for sin weakens the will. In the unregenerate the will inclines towards that which is wholly contrary to the pure conception of Divine love. But the grace given in Baptism inclines the soul towards good; and the gifts of the Holy Ghost yet further strengthen the soul, enabling it to *will the things of God*.

We are in constant need of this enabling gift. It has been ours since the day it was bestowed, although it may have been but as a hidden treasure within our being. As with all other gifts its value is perceived as we carefully use it, and as experience of the Holy Spirit's love and power increases our knowledge of Him.

It is a gift of illumination. As a sacred lamp within the soul it directs our steps most of all when, having used the previous gifts, we are within the Illuminative Way. If its rays light up the path of ordinary conduct, so that we act with prudence, it is because first of all it illuminates for us the whole realm of Divine love, making the will of God beautiful in the very

tenderness of Divine holiness. We are thus guided when we ask to know in order to do His will. There is in the Divine will a marvellous beauty and attractiveness when we approach God in simple love, desiring and loving none but Him. That which makes His will unattractive, and mars its beauty, is our own self-will. Again, we are not attracted to His will because we do not rise above the conditions of this life so as to view that which is spiritual and eternal, beyond what is material and temporal. There is a conception of the Divine beauty of the will of God which we understand when we approach Him in pure love, the joy of which increases as our love becomes purer.

The Divine will is first of all concerned with the end which every soul should keep in view. What is our end? The glory of God and our own salvation. There is nothing in all our life that is not in some way related to that end. We cannot do our duty in the world if we are not in the first instance careful of our own salvation, if we are not directly seeking God and His honour in all things. God first. That is our first consideration : not self-interest in a worldly sense. That is too often a hidden but powerful motive in days when we profess to desire God's will. It is so easy to desire even the things of the Spirit in a worldly sense. We may even want His will to be in favour of some cherished wish of our own. We torture our-

selves in the effort to adjust His will to our wish, to the satisfaction of conscience. But we never succeed. We begin with a wrong outlook. We do not look to our end—God first. We are not quite true to the claims of love; there is self-seeking somewhere. We are not loyal to our Lord. Our aim is really selfish. Therefore all our thoughts are confused, contradictory, wavering. Perhaps we have forgotten the Holy Spirit of Counsel, or are too immersed in anxious thinking to feel His presence, or realize His gift.

This is not untrue to our common experience. But a little more faithful care in forsaking our own will in order to know God's will can be taken by us in any time of difficulty or doubt. "*Thy will be done*" should express our fixed desire.

How, then, shall we approach all questions, great or small, affecting ourselves? How shall we be sure in our decisions? We can only suggest the safe course of spiritual action. Success in following it must depend upon our goodwill, our love, our simplicity of intention, our sincerity. Let us put away every thought but that of the end to be kept in view—God and our own salvation. We must desire that way which will lead us to more perfect knowledge of Him, to greater love, to strengthened virtues, to wider vision. We must forsake ourselves in order to be found in Him.

Is the question before us one that concerns our

state in life? What does God will me to do, to be, to become? It may be He will so draw and move the will that no doubt will be possible as to His way for us. This *is* sometimes, but very rarely, granted. Examples are found in the histories of the Saints who were called by God to particular states of life, or to special work for Him. And He can so reveal His will to any one. But for that one would suppose a certain preparedness within the favoured soul, some secret and sure surrender in love, some condition perceived only by God Himself. Thus vocation to the Sacred Ministry, or to the Religious Life, or to some distinctive mission within the Church, may be related to some secret and interior grace unknown to all but God. Some persons, indeed, are very sure of a direct and inward call, insistent and clear; while others are led by a different way to the understanding of it. God is Himself the sole judge of the soul's fitness for any vocation, and when the right conditions are found He may call suddenly and imperatively. But if we are not so favoured it is not proof that we cannot know His will. Some other way is open to us; a longer way probably, but one through which we go on to greater sanctity, perhaps to the particular degree of grace which God desires in us as the first necessity to vocation; or to that understanding of our state which is essential to our spiritual progress.

In this way the Holy Spirit works in us, making

us discern His good pleasure in a manner sufficiently clear and evident by the application of His grace to our hearts.¹ We experience both consolations and desolations. Let us not repine at this. Rather let us forsake all useless reasoning, all secret discourse with ourselves, in the anxious pursuit of a decision; we usually end as we began—there are the same distressing thoughts, the same tired spirit, the same depressing sense of a burden too heavy to be borne. We think in a circle and never reach a clear issue.

What can we do? What is the highest? What is the high thought of love? What is the sacrifice involved? Can we surrender our wills, and be simply one with the Divine will? Can we ask for this and wait with confidence? Can we in thought and prayer rise little by little, step by step, above every selfish desire, until we reach the pure height of the Divine purpose of love?

This is possible if we approach it with simplicity of will in the full surrender of the self, and with love; but not all at once is the way made easy. God will reveal the beauty of His Own will, and we may so embrace it and desire it that all interior opposition to His purpose ceases for the moment; and then may arise the natural fears, and our courage may fail us until, like our Lord in Gethsemane, we

¹ Cf. Devine: *A Manual of Ascetical Theology*, p. 253.

have renewed the prayer and the surrender again and again. But if we *desire* to know His will, He will certainly reveal it.

Then let us observe on which side we find “spiritual comforts, with a certain peace of mind, enlargement of heart, and confidence in God; on which side we experience desolation, aridity and trouble.”¹ We shall find the peace as we forsake *all* for God. If we are still in perplexity because at one moment we are inclined by consolation to God, and at the next by some desolation towards some other course, let us remember that it is *God* Who gives the peace and consolation; *but He is not the Author of the trouble which perplexes and disturbs us.* That is the work of the enemy, and is to be rejected.

If through all this we are moved by simple love, *i. e.* love which is intent upon God its Object, we shall find it easier. Love reveals and love responds. That is the simple action which makes the soul glad in the will and purpose of God.

We may be shown the Divine will as to our state in another and simpler manner, and also a more sure way. When we are in inward peace, and able to exercise freely our natural powers, and using the gifts of the Holy Ghost, we may make choice of the best means to lead us to our end in the glory of God and our own salvation. But we see that in all

¹ Devine: *A Manual of Ascetical Theology*, p. 254.

ways, at all times, we need lovingly to rely upon the Holy Spirit of Counsel, using His gift.

All we have considered applies as much to every-day things as to decisions concerning our state of life. There is nothing that really matters in any life if it cannot be made to serve the great end of our existence. If we are careful to secure this we shall never find the days barren and unfruitful. There will be the constant call for the practice of the virtue of prudence, which is the virtue set over against the gift of counsel. Prudence is not an earthly virtue; it is the virtue by means of which we seek only the highest, and order our lives wisely to that end.

Let us examine ourselves with simplicity and faithfulness upon our understanding and use of this sacred gift of counsel.

There are times when our consciousness of spiritual and eternal things is made clearer by the direct action upon us of the Holy Spirit, when we realize both the glory of the Divine will, and also our own part in the working out of His purpose of love. There is with us then more than subjective thought—there is vision. If in the vision we behold the glory of the Divine purpose of love, we behold it through the possibilities of our own lives, and in virtue of the sacred gift of counsel. And how beautiful is the vision! It is majestic, because it is beauty of

strength, the revelation of power, made perfect in love; and for us the attraction is found in the reality of our own part in the Divine working. It is the attraction of love. We are sharing the very mind and thought of God. It is no mere sentiment of love, but the strong impulse and lofty inspiration which spring from our own deep sense of loving and being loved. We could not aspire to the perfection of love and not also ascend to that pure conception of union with God which distinguishes the Saints. We do desire that which is presented to us; and although there is so much all around us which tends to obscure the pathway of Divine love, we may preserve the impression and be true to the vision. It may become necessary to readjust our ideas of life and its obligations. We may be compelled to make changes in our way of life; for a changed outlook may not be consistent with our previous attitude. Much can be effected by gradually bringing all our life into conformity to the vision, and the splendid possibilities of holiness presented to us. But never for a moment should we forget the reality of the gift within us. That wonderful gift of counsel, as a lamp, will guide our steps through all the devious ways of life as we go forward, and reveal the clear, if strait, way of the loving purpose of God.

III

The Holy Spirit's gift of counsel assists us likewise in our prayer. What a pure light is shed on our spiritual pathway as in prayer we seek only the knowledge of God's will in order to unite ourselves with it. What calmness possesses the soul, what peace fills it, as it is folded within the pure sense of the Divine purpose of love. We may not be clear as to details, nor immediately certain of developments; but we may be at rest in the certainty of love; we may be sure that all will be well. Possessing the greater good, we know that all else will be found within it.

This is the important consideration in our prayer. We should seek that highest identification of ourselves with the will of God, for therein we find peace. We need not waste time and thought concerning isolated acts or expressions of that will. Peace is found as we rise to the Heart of Divine love.

The vision discloses that love in its unity. Let us be in union with it and peace will fill and strengthen our hearts. Between us and God there is the supernatural gift of counsel, which like a pure light from Himself is shed forth in our hearts, a clear ray by which we may discern the motions of His love. Because it is of the Holy Spirit of love, the gift itself is essentially love, therefore it is a means of union

with God. We may prove it in prayer, and find our comfort in the peace of God.

In prayer we experience so much of God that not only is He more really known in all His relations to ourselves, but also He is known in Himself. And part of that revelation of love in which God is Self-revealed is the unfolding of His eternal purpose towards us. If we contemplate it with desire to order our lives aright, it is found to be not only a manifestation of His purpose, but also an attraction of His love. We cannot love His will without loving Him the more; for thereby we attain to the vision of His beauty.

IV

What must not this gift of counsel be to the Saint in whose soul it has not only been preserved, but also increased! We cannot, for all our joy here in the will of God, estimate the rapture of the Saints who have passed from the high knowledge of it on earth to the perfection of identification with it. We do not conceive aright of their joy in God if we only think of that which may be *objective* in the Beatific Vision. The Saints enjoy something deeper, more essentially of love and life, than could be reached within objective limitations. There is a *subjective* aspect of their life of joy which consists in their spiritual relation to God. It is in spirit they

are endowed and empowered by the Holy Spirit's gifts. Therefore they are enabled to *rejoice with God* in that which is eternally His joy. As He rejoices in the eternal perfection of His love, so the Saints, according to their power of knowing this same love, rejoice with Him, and that in the rapture of perfect union. The joy of the soul passes into the joy of God, as His joy passes into the soul. It is a joy which holds God and His Saints in the glory and rapture of the Beatific Vision.

We must admit the truth that every gift of the Holy Ghost is a means of our union with God. As severally "habits" they unite in that spiritual character of the Saint which it is so hard to define, however superbly it may rise above our common conceptions of life. The character of a Saint is the fullness of a Divine conception. When we see the Saints in glory we shall know, and rejoice in, the creative love of God which could call into being personalities by means of which He expresses Himself. We shall see that the glory of the Saints is their oneness with that eternal love.

Is the thought, the vision, too high? No; for it is only the truth concerning our own spiritual nature. Rather let it spur us on to holier love, if so be we may attain to a like understanding of the purpose of God, and to a portion among His Saints.

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O Almighty and Eternal God, Whose purpose of love is realized in the glory of Thy Saints; enable us so to exercise ourselves in the Holy Spirit's gift of counsel that we may both know Thy will, and also rejoice in being obedient thereto. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

VII

The Gift of Understanding

I

THE two remaining gifts of the Holy Ghost which we have to consider, Understanding and Wisdom, are very closely allied, and seem in some aspects scarcely distinguishable, except that wisdom goes beyond all that we may assert of understanding. The gift of understanding is that by means of which Divine truth is apprehended with clearness. Innocence, simplicity, and purity of soul are conditions necessary to its perfection. It may be more strikingly evident in a little child than in one who has greater experience of life in the world, because in the older person the light of truth may be obscured through sin. Hence a childlike clearness of soul may be observed in those Saints to whom have been granted the most sublime revelations of God. The Holy Spirit's gift both preserves and rewards this grace in the soul.

In our Lord Beloved this gift of understanding is resplendent. We contemplate the stainless purity of His soul, and behold it as the very mirror of truth.

Is He propounding doctrines which have exercised the greatest minds in the Church? Is it some profound truth concerning Himself, His relation to the Father, His presence in the Blessed Sacrament? Is it some precept for the faithful? Is it some teaching concerning the common duties of life, the practice of the virtues, or some holy aspirations? It is with the same simple clearness. He is Himself within the light of that pure gift of the Spirit—understanding. Our Lord never argues. He asserts. He declares that which is, and employs no argument. That is only possible with the possession of pure truth.

Incidentally we may observe how manifestly wrong it is to argue about our Lord's words; and if we rightly value in ourselves the gift of understanding we shall not argue, but accept in love what He declares. But do we not often obscure the truth of His teaching through our love of argument? It is often necessary to examine our Lord's words in order to make their meaning clear, or to understand their reference to circumstances and conditions of the time and place of utterance; but when we receive His words as expressing the truth in the pure light of which He lived, how clear are those principles of holiness which He declares for our guidance.

How glorious is the vision of eternal truth to our Lord. He sees nothing as it were shadowed, or distorted; nothing out of proportion. He is one with

the truth itself. Therefore both in speech and action He expresses and declares the truth. He reveals the mental and spiritual attitude towards conditions and circumstances in life which man should assume to whom the truth is clear. It is the revelation which inspires the Saint. But as the gift of understanding is supernatural, so also is the light with which it fills the soul. That clear understanding of eternal truth which the Saints share with their Lord, even while living in the world, is increased as they use the Holy Spirit's gift in contemplation of their Lord. But it is not known apart from that faithful use; and that is why it is not more generally perceived in the world to-day. The Divine light of spiritual understanding is the reward of a devotion that is not common. But it would surely be most wondrously diffused if all who have received the gift would be faithful in using it. Let them follow the light as it is given in their prayer, and seek to know the truth as it is in Jesus.

II

Understanding and wisdom belong properly to the Unitive Way. They are developed as the soul advances through purgation and illumination, but they attain their proper glory in the individual as the soul is transformed in unitive love. Even as

we contemplate the several gifts as they are to be seen in our Lord Beloved, we perceive an advance towards the perfect interior glory of the Hypostatic Union. The last two glow with a certain Divine light and splendour within, and that because of that wondrous union of the two natures. They are likewise found in the saint as light and splendour according to the degree of his union with God in Christ. Now union with the Beloved is effected by love. Therefore we approach the consideration of these two gifts within ourselves from the standpoint of our love to Him. In this chapter we confine ourselves to the consideration of the gift of understanding. Let us first of all withdraw into the simple consciousness of our love to our Lord, and let the inspiring beauty of truth in Him hold us in contemplation of that which in Him is given to us.

Our love has wrought within our souls in the use we have made of the Holy Spirit's gifts from the earliest understanding of their order and place in the supernatural life. There has been effected both a certain degree of purgation, and also a certain degree of illumination. It is to be noted that in the way of purgation there is a certain action of the understanding, assisted by this gift of the Spirit. The soul recognizing the benefits of purgation, goes forth with freedom and becomes more divine. It rejoices in the clear rays of truth, apprehending it in love.

St. John of the Cross says : " United to God in that purgation, it understands no more within its former limits and narrow bounds, but in the Divine wisdom to which it is united." The Saint appears to think of the soul rising to the light of pure understanding, catching, as it were, the beams of that yet more wondrous light of wisdom. Thus we progress in the unitive way ; for the more perfect the illumination the more certainly do we begin to experience the joys of union with our Lord.

Mystics speak of certain brief touches of Divine love which they experience who are faithful in love under all trials and discipline to which they are subjected. God Who watches over them, tempering their sufferings, and replenishing their strength, visits them with brief consolations. And the relation of that experience to their possession of the gift of understanding is apparent. A certain light from those moments pervades the soul accompanied by a clearer apprehension of truth. The spiritual pathway is illuminated, the soul's action is directed, thought is sustained, and holy aspiration follows. The soul endeavours to retain the light, and to abide within it. Yet by no power of our own may we either attain to such moments, or retain the passing vision ; for until the purgative way is passed we have not the power within ourselves. Such experience may in the goodness of God become more frequent, and of

longer duration. And the light increases. The sacred gift of understanding is cherished the more as its supernatural light is perceived.

As these "touches" are succeeded by longer and more frequent occasions of passive union, as in some states of prayer, the interior light becomes more clear and lasting. We are more identified with the truth, even when for the time we feel our own incapacity; for the weakness which the soul feels is often the result of its advance. The effect of our spiritual experience may be felt in this fear for our own state—doubtless permitted that we may be kept humble. The light is shed abroad with such effect upon the whole inner consciousness, that all the sacred gifts are used with a holier and more loving correspondence to the Holy Spirit's purpose. We understand the ways of God. We possess the truth in realization of its beauty. We desire its perfection, and that desire is expressed in one simple act—the one act of love which embraces the whole life of thought and action.

That beautiful exultation in the truth of God, so simple and natural, as we behold it in the Saints, or begin to feel within ourselves, is a fruit of union, the soul having left its former worldly way, and realizing herself within the pure love which exalts her, finds in everything that which answers to her own true being. Union with God is the consummation

we hope for, knowing it is His will for us. The soul using the Holy Spirit's gifts, and attaining to a perfect understanding of them, begins to realize the truth of union with God. It is the end of the way of love followed simply and bravely, in the light of the truth of God.

All our life should be so lived that we may attain to this high union. We should mark the progress of our souls through all the varied experiences of our days. Between those experiences—and they are all essentially of love—there may be days of shadow and of pain; and we may not always perceive the intimate relation of the one to the other. But faithfulness to our Lord Beloved will lead to clearer understanding of what His love is because we try to respond to its claims. We shall feel the attraction of His love more than the pain of our discipline. He will attract us until in love of Him we lose all desire for the world. Its attraction for us will cease. It may be brought home to us as we regard the *natural* understanding in contrast with that which is ours through the Holy Spirit's gifts; the difference may appear to us as that between darkness and light. We must forsake the one for the other. We must not choose that which is merely natural when we are called to the supernatural.

We should offer no obstruction to the Divine work of love in ourselves. Rather remove such as exist,

if they consist in any superfluous thing. And how small a matter may avail to hinder the progress of the soul is well known to us if we are dealing faithfully with ourselves. Love if it possesses the soul will teach the way of truth—for this gift of understanding is essentially love.

III

The gift of understanding is, of course, necessary to the soul that would advance in prayer. The light of understanding, by reason of its pureness, extends to the farthest bounds of Divine truth. The soul in prayer is raised by this gift to great clearness. The mysteries of the Faith are illuminated, the soul's relation to each mystery is understood in a manner that exalts it in admiration of Divine truth as it is perceived; eternally beautiful, but holding within itself the secret of its beauty—Eternal Love. Understanding is not the final, or crowning, gift; therefore in prayer the soul cannot rest in it alone. The prayer of understanding could not be by itself alone the prayer of union. It is good prayer, lofty, beautiful prayer. And there may be occasions when the Holy Spirit will constrain us to remain in contemplation of pure truth. But when He thus holds the soul, it is in order to strengthen its power of vision, or to confirm it in the Faith; for the soul that will

attain to the union of love must be strong in the Faith. It must also be strong in the virtue of faith; for as this virtue is higher than understanding, and always soars beyond it how great soever it may be, it is clear that the gift of understanding impels the soul towards the obscure flight of faith. And that flight encourages hope, while love, ever eager for the perfect union, reaches out to the Heart of Eternal truth, the Heart of Eternal love. It were well always to contemplate some elements of Eternal truth as the stimulus to affective prayer. The admiration evoked would more often lead to joy in the perfections of God, and the praise of love would enlarge our hearts and give occasion for the exercise of the understanding.

There is also to be noticed in this connection the great importance of that simple spiritual exercise which is described by Bossuet as the Prayer of Simplicity. "It consists in a simple interior look, one loving attention on our part towards some Divine object; either God Himself, or one of His infinite perfections; or our Lord Jesus Christ in some of His mysteries; or some of the Christian truths. The soul, then, leaving all reasoning, makes use of a tender contemplation, which keeps her in peace, attentive and susceptible to all the Divine operations and impressions which the Holy Spirit communicates to her." From this we may learn how the soul may

by most simple means attain to ever clearer light. Using in prayer the gift of understanding, she passes to the exercise of the virtue of faith in so simple a manner that almost imperceptibly she is attracted to the light of Eternal truth. Without reasoning she is possessed of truth. She is interiorly illuminated. And with such aids to love we are not surprised at the rapid advance of a soul in the way of union.

The great value of such simple prayer is that it can be practised at all times; there is no work or legitimate occupation which can really hinder it. Rather all we do may be raised by such prayer and made fruitful in the ways of the Holy Spirit Who "giveth light and understanding to nourish the hearts of the simple."

IV

Hereafter, if through the infinite mercy of God we are found among His Saints, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable in this gift of understanding. Here on earth we are able to discern the beauty of Divine truth through all the shadows raised by sin and ignorance, but there the full glory of Truth will enrapture us. Even as the Cherubim are made glorious by reason of their response to eternal truth, so we, upon whom the sacred gift of understanding

has been bestowed, are destined to bear a peculiar glory of light according to the degree of perfection attained through use of the gift. It will be a glory, a splendour of sanctity radiating from, rather than resting upon, the Saints. The gift which enables them to understand truth as it is in God, becomes through use more wonderfully beautiful as a joyous interior power, and a wondrous interior light. It is surely by no trick of human imagination that we picture the radiance of the Saints. If on Mount Tabor our Lord's Human Body was radiant with light, we may, in the language of the Church's prayer, declare that God did "wondrously foreshow the perfect adoption of (His) sons": and know that there awaits for the Saint a glory and a power in the possession of Divine truth, made possible of attainment through the Holy Spirit's gift of understanding.

While now we use the gift, regarding the vision with longing eyes, it may well seem that we dare hardly consider ourselves as the future subjects of such glorious communications of eternal truth, but through all our days of struggle within the shadows, and even darkness of our way, we are to know that we are but gaining the freedom of spirit which is granted to the Saints. The day must come when Divine truth will be known in its fullness and splendour, and they who have faithfully used their gift on earth will find in themselves the power to behold, and the

life to witness to that Truth which is Divine and Eternal.

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O Everlasting God, Who art eternally truth; enable us we pray Thee so to use the Holy Spirit's gift of understanding that we may both rejoice in Thy truth here upon earth, and also hereafter praise Thee for ever within its glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Spirit, one God world without end. Amen.

VIII

The Gift of Wisdom

I

THE Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom is the greatest of all the seven. It crowns and completes the spiritual endowment of the soul. We therefore contemplate it in our Incarnate Lord as that gift by means of which He showed forth the very power and glory of Divine love. It is the most beautiful of all the gifts; but its glory is seen as it unites the lights of all the other gifts into one clear beam of Divine radiance.

This gift of wisdom is greater than that of understanding, although most closely allied with it. It is more than the most perfect apprehension of Divine truth. It is concerned with all knowledge and understanding; but it goes beyond them, as love goes beyond all the virtues, because it is of the very nature of God Himself. Wisdom is the most glorious of all the gifts of the Holy Ghost. "Who," says Bishop Ullathorne, "can declare the splendour of this gift? Implanted in the human heart, it illumines Divine and eternal things, and gives us the sense of eternal good. Human wisdom consists of the

knowledge of things in their causes, and especially in their supreme cause. But the gift of Divine Wisdom is a certain created participation of the Holy Spirit, as He is the Eternal Wisdom. That Eternal Wisdom is the infinite light of the infinite love of the Father and the Son in the Person of the Holy Ghost.”¹ Contemplating this splendid gift in our Lord Beloved, how dazzling is that light of infinite love within His Soul, rising above even the pure brightness of the gift of understanding! How glorious is this gift within Him! United in His Sacred Person are the powers of the Son of Man and the Consubstantial Word. The very splendour of the Divine light is the glory of His Being. Who can express that which is beyond the reach of language? We can only prostrate our souls in adoration, and in unspeakable thankfulness for all that is thereby assured to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that which cannot be perfectly apprehended by the intellect may yet be spiritually discerned by means of the gift within ourselves. If we exercise ourselves in loving contemplation of our Lord, we may discern through the meeting of love with love the wonders of the light and glory of the perfect love in Him—that is, the Divine Wisdom. We may perceive not only the working of that love in His life before men, but also, and in particular, how in Him

¹ *Christian Patience*, Lect. IX.

love is the principle of action; and more, that it is the Divine principle, the same in Him as in the essential life of the Divine Trinity. That which is the very glory of God is contemplated as likewise the glory of man. We behold in the Second Adam the glory for which the first Adam was created. The glory of love—the glory of eternal wisdom.

Not all at once do we understand the perfect revelation of Divine wisdom in our Lord. It is given as we love. Its secret glory is shown only as love seeks it; that is, as the soul that loves, perceiving its splendour, responds with more perfect self-giving to Him through the practice of love. Then the wisdom which is not of this world guides the soul in the ways of holiness and exalts it to union with the Beloved, and makes it share with unspeakable joy in the ecstasy of His Sacred Heart.

II

We considered in the previous chapter the gift of understanding, and we saw how it exalted the soul to the light of Divine truth. What now can we say of Wisdom, that supreme and utterly glorious gift? Its light is perceived as an ever-brightening ray as one by one the Holy Spirit's gifts are used; because every gift is perfected in love which is the highest

wisdom. As the gifts are understood in relation to the three common divisions of the Mystic Way, Purgation, Illumination, Union, so the glory of the sacred gift of wisdom develops in splendour as it is approached. From the realization of the gift of understanding we gaze immediately upon the glory of Divine wisdom. We no longer look through the medium of a relatively lower gift, but with a certain clearness of open vision. The night of obscurity has passed. The day of vision has dawned. The light of this wonderful gift will become brighter as it is followed, as the light of some planet may increase from day to day until the fullness of its beam delights the observer. It is the glory of Divine love filling and illuminating the soul according to the degree of its union with God. The soul in which it is found in prevailing power becomes of one mind with God, and that in a manner that may be described as essential; that is, of the essence of the Divine impulsion; that, as the life of God is essentially love, and all His actions love, the Divine impulse being love, so the soul in which the gift of wisdom is found in a perfect degree acts through the union of love with God. The Saints may speak of the perfect soul as "Deiform," as being "by participation God," but they are expressing the effect of love, that is of this Divine gift of wisdom.

As God acts only by love, and His love is co-

essential with His light, He is "love" and He is "light," ¹ so the soul exercised in Divine wisdom acts by love in the clearness of Divine light. The gift is one that affects the secret union of the soul with God. It is evident in the outer life mainly through its pervasion of the other gifts in their ascending order, and also in that supernatural and simple characteristic of the Saints wherein they appear like unto God in spiritual perception and discernment of the high prerogative of love. As the mystical union is effected by love alone, so we see the gift of wisdom is supremely theirs who through the goodness of God are in the way of union.

We may perceive how this gift may be ours through our response to the grace of sacramental union with our Lord. The union of love may properly be said to begin with that increase of love within the soul which follows upon faithfulness to sacramental grace. Every fresh experience of Divine love granted to us through the sacraments, every touch of the Divine union in our prayer, confirms in us the gift of wisdom, and prepares us for the fullness of the gift in perfect union. As therefore we are guided in the way which for the saint can only end in the glory of Heaven, we begin to understand what is the wondrous light of the presence of God regarded spiritually and mystically. It is the light and glory of Divine

¹ S. John i. 5; iv. 8.

wisdom, which is Divine love manifest in the glory of God and the Saints.

We have but to mark the progress of the Saints in the Unitive Way to see how this glorious gift is developed. It is developed by the simple response of the soul in love to the pure love of God. It will be seen that it follows always upon the purification of love within the soul itself; and that not only as passively endured by the soul, but also, and particularly, as the result of direct, and often heroic, action on the part of the soul. Are we ourselves conscious of the pure light of this sacred gift of wisdom within ourselves? Do we in any degree realize a certain oneness of mind with God in the ways of love? Are we at the same time aware of imperfections, limitations, in the exercise of this gift? It is because our own love is not wholly pure. But we have the fullest encouragement. There is often some unsuspected imperfection in love, some admixture of self-interest, or some hesitation when the demands of Divine love appear to be beyond our strength to meet. His word to the Saints is: "Much do I delight in pure love." If therefore we are conscious of failing in pure love, let us not be discouraged; for we know the failure through the very light of that wisdom by means of which we also perceive the perfections of love. Our part is plain. We must begin at once to correspond to the interior showings of that same wisdom.

It is inwardly revealed to us wherein our love lacks the very mark of perfection which our Lord seeks in us. It is not by any outward failure that we are taught most truly our defects in love; but inwardly as the Holy Spirit searches our hearts, and discovers to us the secret failures, and hidden motions of self-love, and unworthy attachments. By the interior light of holy wisdom our defects are shown in striking contrast to that purity which God desires. We know it; and by no art of reasoning may we change the secret witness of the illumined conscience. But the way of love's ascent begins when we are humbled and contrite before the evidence of our own failure. Great indeed is the effort required, but great also is the grace assured, and glorious is that reward of love promised in the perfection of the gift of Divine wisdom. The love that we express in contrition is the same that rejoices in the abounding goodness of God Who, having bestowed His gift, also aids us in the right use of it.

III

Love, as it rises to God in our prayer, follows the light of the gift of wisdom. Love enters into the secret ways of God and views eternal truth as from within; all the wondrous ways of God, His secret working, His manifestations of power and goodness,

are viewed as from within a certain knowledge of love's eternal purpose. It is not to the soul a mere act of beholding the pageant of Divine operations; it is rather the pure apprehension of that wonder of love's working in which it, too, has a place and a share. There is such a communication of love between the soul and the Beloved, that they may be said to share Divine secrets. This is no exaggeration, as any one may know who has any experience of the flight of love in prayer. The soul is aware of a certain Divine expression of love, a sense of life energizing through love, into which it is itself taken, and in which it finds itself loving and willing and in full accord with that Divine love. The soul knows that it is by the very power of Divine love that it is enabled to do this, and recognizes the infinite goodness of God to one so unworthy as itself, but also it rejoices that it can so love in oneness of purpose with Him. If for brief moments we are permitted to experience this is our prayer, we must feel more than ever the need of purity in all our spiritual powers; for we shall long only to be worthy of the high calling of love. We shall desire the perfection of wisdom that we may be found always ready to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He opens to us the treasures of the infinite Divine wisdom. God Who sees in the soul He loves such a desire will not fail to share with it the secrets of His Own love. That is the experience

of the Saints. God seeks the intimacy of love with us, and alas ! we hinder His purpose, and miss the happiness He desires to give.

Do we marvel at the exceeding love of the Saints ? Could they love less when they have shared the very secrets of Divine wisdom ? Is not their prayer an experience on earth of that which is the very beginning of eternal blessedness ? We must beware indeed of assuming that they already have on earth the joys of Heaven ; for between the greatest experience possible on earth and that of the Saints in glory there is an inconceivable distance. But it helps us to realize the exaltation of the Saints, and also teaches us the need of continual aspiration. How great soever our present spiritual attainment, we dare not presume upon it, but with humility persevere in the lowliest ways of love. Such warning is not unnecessary. States of grace and of exalted love are not without their dangers, and many a fair promise may not be fulfilled. “ *Be not high-minded, but fear.* ”

In our prayer let us respond more and more in love to love. Great care and great patience will be necessary. But we have the gift of wisdom, we have the beginnings of love. “ *Let us go on unto perfection* ” in the very way of love. It is the will of the Holy Ghost to perfect in us His Own Gifts. That He has bestowed His gifts is the strongest assurance to us that we are called to the state of union. Let us rise

to the dignity with the courage of profound humility, the resolution of dauntless love.

IV

Words would fail us if we attempted to describe the glory and brilliance of this resplendent gift as it will be seen in Heaven. It will be, we are sure, the crowning magnificence of the Love of God. All our experience of His love now indicates the ineffable character of that which awaits us. What is it that we perceive in certain moments of prayer? What is the purpose of those pure intuitions of love, and holiness, which are occasionally granted to us? Is it not that we perceive with sufficient clearness to encourage us the brightness of eternal glory? Are not those intuitions real anticipations of the Vision of God? Words may be poor and thought may fail; but beyond language, and exceeding all thought, the soul *knows because it loves*. “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.*”¹ Let us treasure this secret witness of the Spirit of God, and press onward with hopeful love.

We may fairly consider in this connection the two gifts : understanding and wisdom, because they are

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

so closely allied. The glory of these two gifts in Heaven corresponds to their relation on earth. Understanding and wisdom seem to correspond to the respective glory of the Cherubim and Seraphim. If we contemplate them we are awed by their purity, their majesty of holiness, the dignity of their very being as they serve and adore. We begin to understand somewhat of that which awaits the Saints, of that which humbly we admit is the glory of being with which the Beloved wills to invest the soul that has been faithful unto death, faithful through all, and at all costs, to the great ideal of love. Can we put ourselves in thought, in love, with the hosts of sanctified ones in whom the purpose of love has been fulfilled? The effort is worth while; for from such contemplation may spring more loving aspiration. To aspire to God's Own purpose towards ourselves is the first step towards attainment. Shall He reveal His purpose of love towards us and we remain indifferent? Not thus will it be with us if we have learned through faithful use how necessary and how blessed to us are the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

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In these short chapters we have tried to trace the course of the spiritual life as the soul is aided by the Holy Ghost. Divinely endowed, we may know within ourselves both the richness and power of that life. Can we recognize ourselves in the vision of souls

made strong through use of the sacred gifts? Are we afraid? Can we not joyfully accept the assurance conveyed by the very fact of our endowment? Can we not with glad confidence go forward? The answer lies deep within our own souls. It is *there* where love is truest, and hope brightest, and faith strongest. *There* where love in us meets the love of God—and *knows*.

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O Everlasting God, in the brightness of Whose wisdom we contemplate the energy of eternal love; make us so to abound in love to Thee, that the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom may increase in us unto that glory wherein Thou art to Thy holy ones their everlasting happiness in love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

THE END

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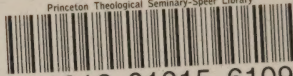
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